

The SHERIFF
of WASCO

CHARLES·ROSS·JACKSON



WHAT THE CRITICS SAY OF
THE SHERIFF OF WASCO

By
CHARLES ROSS JACKSON

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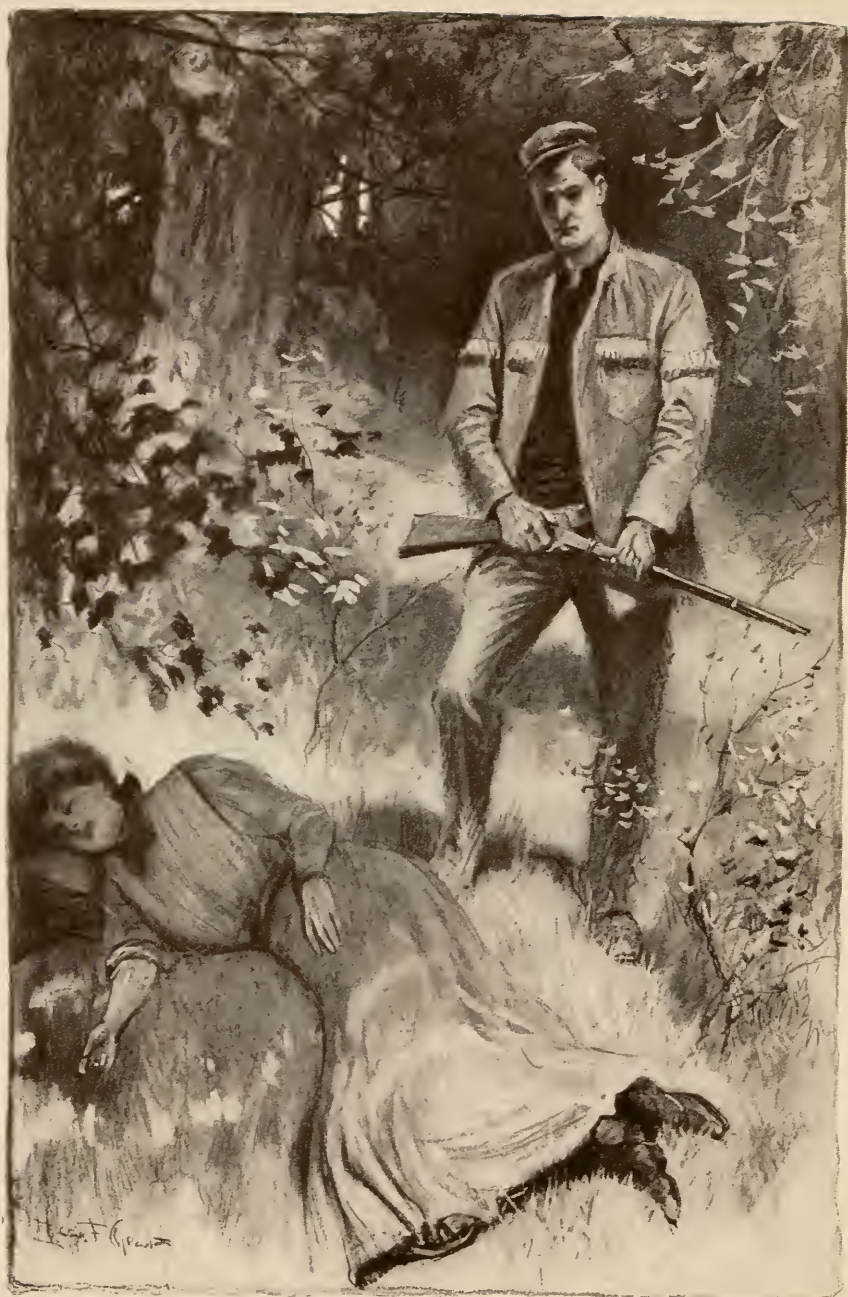
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They were alone on the wild mountainside.
Frontispiece.

THE SHERIFF OF W A S C O

BY
CHARLES ROSS JACKSON



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
LOUIS F. GRANT

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The Sheriff of Wasco

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THE SHERIFF OF WASCO.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHERIFF'S DUTY.

WASCO COUNTY in the State of Oregon had recently held an election to fill the vacant post of Sheriff. Considering the vote was unanimous, there being but one candidate who aspired to the honor, a stranger might have thought Wasco was unduly triumphant and elated at the result. The citizens, however, knew their own affairs. The last Sheriff had been shot, and his posse overpowered, by a band of desperate law-breakers and criminals who had chosen the hills of Wasco county for their rendezvous. The leader, a wild cutthroat named Hardeman, whom the marshals and sheriffs of other states would gladly have laid their hands on, had sent an insolent defiance into Centreville, begging for an early election, that he might have another Sheriff to annihilate.

The newly-elected Sheriff was not a politician

but a civil engineer by profession. Heretofore he had held a good position with the railroad, and was generally regarded as a man of prospects. But when the old Sheriff was shot and the people of Wasco sought in their indignation and distress for some one whom they could pit against Hardeman and his ruffians, it was to this young engineer, who had lived the greater part of his life in their midst, and whom they knew for a man of indomitable courage and resourcefulness, that their hopes turned. He was the man for the emergency, if he could but be persuaded of it. So a committee of the citizens waited upon him and in breezy Western style informed him how the case stood. They knew he was doing well with the railroad, they admitted, and that the position of Sheriff was a mighty poor one alongside the one that he held. But they needed somebody besides a politician for Sheriff *just now*. They hereby requested him to run for office, because they thought he was the kind that could rid the county of Hardeman and his gang. They firmly believed he was the only man thereabouts who was built with the necessary qualifications; and they needed his services—by thunder, they did.

The young man colored slightly, looked keenly at the committee as it faced him expectantly, and remarked:—

“If the citizens of Wasco want me, if they think they need me—hang it, I’ll try!”

This was the reason for the rejoicing and the lack of opposition in Wasco.

He entered on his duties as Sheriff with a quiet enthusiasm that hugely delighted his friends, because they knew its meaning so well. Though he was young he was of the kind that raises expectations in men’s minds when coolness and ready wit and iron courage are the needs of the moment. Tall, lean and brown, with a gray-blue fearless eye that women remembered and criminals also if they lived long enough, he knew every one of the desperadoes by sight, and they knew him for the best shot in Oregon.

Some day, sooner or later, Hardeman was going to meet a man who could *fight*, and who could draw his gun with a quick, silent, hitching motion that was quicker than the draw of any other man in the Northwest; and the county of Wasco was deeply, supremely confident of the result.

The efforts of the new Sheriff were crowned with success, one reason for which, perhaps, was his daredevil spirit and the inborn love of adventure which carried him beyond what even outlaws themselves would dare. He was their close kinsman in that respect; indeed he might have been an outlaw himself were it not for the

unswerving upward slant of his nature toward righteousness which had made him a Sheriff instead. No expedition that he led failed. His posses followed him with boundless faith, because it was a peculiarity of his to inspire confidence in those whom he enlisted. After six months such a number of the renegades had suffered capture or death that the remainder were severely discouraged and melted away to points beyond the jurisdiction of the young Wasco Sheriff. Some few, however, remained; and of these the most dangerous was the leader, Harde-man, who held his ground, breathing wild oaths of vengeance on his enemy.

The high crimes for which this outlaw was responsible were numerous, and their details only too well known to every man in that region. Abductions, train robberies, and hold-ups in nearly every neighboring county and state were in the list. He was wanted for several murders, mostly of women who had fallen into his clutches; yet side by side with the stories of his fierce lawlessness and inhuman disregard for life came queer tales of his good looks and his gallantry to the sex. Evil and cruel and treacherous as he was at all times, he could nevertheless be agreeable and ingratiating, and could fawn and flatter like a courtier when it suited his own purposes. Men feared him for his cunning and his murderous

tendencies, his strength, and his deadly use of his gun. Women feared him as they would have feared a wild man-ape or a passionate gorilla. When he captured a woman he rarely allowed his followers access to her, having competent devices of his own for torturing her to death. Here and there one would escape wholly unharmed. But this whimsical mercy appeared to be due merely to his vanity, for despite his rapacity and wickedness he had a grimly humorous conception of himself as a lovelorn troubadour, and occasionally it happened that a victim would owe her escape to it.

One day some twenty miles outside Centreville the Sheriff and his posse, wet to the skin and fiercely disgusted with the mere mention of outlaws, climbed sullenly a lonely hillside trail. A storm was raging, and the heights above were a dripping tangled wilderness, while below the dark swaying growths concealed the precipitous descent to the river, rushing with the voice and fury of a torrent toward the falls half a mile lower down the gorge.

Somewhere in the storm-beaten wilds above was Hardeman with the remnant of his gang, only five now, but all the choicer spirits, for it was a war which only the fittest survived to fight. Their latest outbreak had been a bank robbery not far from Centreville, in the perform-

ance of which they had murdered the watchman and escaped untouched with their plunder into the hills. A young settler, known to the locality as Jeff, had carried the news to the Sheriff at Centreville and been one of the first to join the posse which started instantly in pursuit.

High up around the shoulder of the hill as it rose sheerly out of the gorge and flung its wooded contours against the stormy sky, a light gleamed through the drenched boughs. It came from a deserted cabin standing well back from the trail and almost overhanging the steep. Within its shelter were the five whom the posse, two miles further down the trail, was seeking. Hardeman himself was not present. With the wariness of the large beast of prey he was prowling about the vicinity of his new lair before intrusting himself to it, and in his absence those lesser ones were drinking and boasting and otherwise making merry, believing themselves secured by the tempest.

“What a sweet night! Say you, leave something in that bottle, will you, an’ shove it along here quick. What d’ you think ’s keeping Devil Hardeman out so long?”

“Blown over the cliff, I hope, where the shack’s goin’ too if this wind keeps up. No, you don’t git that bottle, Tarrant; you’ve had enough. Want to git the Devil down on us?”

"That's all right. I'll drink when I choose, an' the Devil be hanged. Where's that loot he's got stowed away somewhere fer safe-keepin'—eh? Tell me that, will you? I want my share. He's a hawg, he is."

"Tell him so, sonny."

The shack resounded with a growling laugh. The boaster subsided.

"Yes, he's a hawg all right," agreed the second. "He gits the hawg's share of it all—includin' the loot an' the fun, an' most particklarly the sex. Ladies is his prime stunt, ther's no denyin' it. You, Tarrant, we hereby app'int you a committee o' one to tell him them there failin's o' his."

Evidently it was a joke which bore repetition. The servility of their leering laughter, the abashed anger of the one they taunted, bore witness for them that they were lesser ones, and had a master whose qualities they envied and feared.

"Who're you to talk anyway?" said the butt, aroused to valor by their jeers. "Think I'm one o' your sort, do you? Why you couldn't shoot that bank watchman last week at twenty yards, an' Hardeman had to come an' smash him on the head afore he'd keep quiet. When I shoot, I shoot straight. An' when I git ready to talk to Hardeman he'll listen, you bet."

"But while he's here you won't drink.—Take that, you barking pup."

The band wheeled around cautiously as a heavy flask, aimed at Tarrant's head, emphasized the words and silenced him. Within the wind-shaken door stood their master, his evil mouth smiling at them.

"I'm listening, you bluffers. Don't you all talk at once," he scoffed. His voice was as evil as his mouth, but neither loud nor harsh; on the contrary, it was as smooth and quiet and fascinating as the blue sheen on his half-raised Colt.

"You can put up yer gun. We ain't kickin'," said one of the lesser ones.

"That's good."

Hardeman slipped back the Colt, and slouched toward them jeeringly, not yet placated. He was the youngest, though he was chief. It was a jest among them, though one not mentioned in his presence, that he was not unlike his mortal enemy the Sheriff of Wasco. A handsome air of strength sat on his wild face, not overcome even by its potentiality for wickedness. He had the deadly grace and sureness of movement of the panther, and he was equally unhampered by those little weaknesses that come with the growth of the social instinct, such as mercy and justice, and consideration for the rights of others. Else he would not have been the alert

bandit he was, or the master of that assembled company.

His eyes, glittering with savage satire, were fixed upon Tarrant the boaster, who stood directly in front of the shelf whereon reposed two bottles of the forbidden whiskey. Pausing for the space of a second before him the master bandit whipped out his Colt again with a lightning like flash, and sent two shots crashing past the fellow's face, so close that the boaster stood with a streak of blood traversing one cheek, while behind his head the bottles flew to splinters and the whiskey dripped over the shelf.

"Seems to me you said y' could shoot straight. Any straighter'n that, Mr. Tarrant?" inquired Hardeman softly and insolently.

The frightened bandit staggered back against the wall, his hands upraised. "I'm done. I ain't in the same class with you. You're Devil Hardeman," he laughed with shaking servility.

"Keep it in yer mind," said Hardeman. Then he looked round the group.

"No drinks fer this outfit till we're in safe territory. That's my rule, an' you know it. Understand? I ain't no Temperance lady ordinarily. Any o' you got objections to make?"

They agreed with him hastily, knowing his uncertain temper. With one hand on his hip he surveyed them, a swaggering smile on his

swarthy face proclaiming that, despite appearances, his mood tonight was amiable.

“No drinks, boys, but something a heap better. The trouble with us is our tastes ain’t refined enough. We’re a set o’ wanderin’ prodigal sons. Livin’ the way we do we don’t git no refined comp’ny to speak of. Ain’t that so?” He closed one eye and leered at them with the other, while his face with its wild suggestions of beauty was doubly terrible because of some seed of possible goodness that had once struggled for growth in it, but was now lost for ever. “Seems to me this here outfit’s in need o’ the elevatin’ sassiety o’ womankind.”

With shouts of profane laughter they crowded about him, demanding eagerly to know his plans. So he unfolded them shortly.

“The creek down below is flooded up. It’s got hold o’ the sawmill, an’ the men are all out rakin’ in the timber—” he paused again with the wicked smile creeping to his mouth and his eyelid dropping salaciously.

With a whoop of comprehension they hitched forward their weapons and examined them hurriedly. He was a leader to follow, despite his slight faults of temperament. But a sudden unpleasant thought struck one of them.

“There’s that consarned thief of a Sheriff! Whereabouts do you reckon he is to-night?”

"In bed with his nightcap an' a hot water bottle," said Hardeman in his slow, fiercely musical voice. "Or he'd better be, hang him! But just in case he ain't—" the master bandit betrayed the unadmitted fear in his soul as he drew out a white hairy mass from his clothing, and in another moment stood transfigured before their eyes, a tall old man, white-haired and diabolic, with a tragic limp.

They howled their appreciation of him. Laying his Colt on the table he condescended to the humor of the moment, and hobbled amiably about the dimly-lit shack.

"The natural protector of distressed ladies! That's me! Ask the Sheriff o' Wasco," he drawled sportively. "He's the reg'ler hall-marked article himself——"

But the master had done a rare thing in separating himself from his weapon—and it proved a deadly mistake. With a ponderous crash the crazy door of the shack flew open; in a second the room was filled with a crowd of determined-faced angry men. Foremost among them was the Sheriff, at whose nod a man leaped forward and seized the Colt lying on the table. Hardeman recognized him as the settler who had witnessed the affair at the bank and escaped, owing to bad management.

The surprised bandits made a desperate fight.

The posse was furious to discover that the leader, the chief object of the pursuit, was apparently absent. In the instant melee that took place they had no time to notice the lame, hoary headed wickedness standing unarmed, but diabolically alert, in the corner, his eyes glaring defiance as the band, grimly fighting, went down before the victorious angry posse.

Seeing himself unobserved, an illumined crafty look mingled for a second with his malignancy. Another second and rage got the better of craft as the third man went down with a bullet in his shoulder, shouting to him for help. With a snarl of fury the white-haired one leaped on the assailants, flinging them back with prodigious strength, wielding his aged iron fists like sledge-hammers. A pistol held in the hand of Jeff, the informer, pointing straight between his eyes recalled him. Of what use to betray himself to yonder lynx-eyed enemy of his, the Sheriff, whom in the depths of his soul he dreaded—for a mere matter of friendship? Black rage almost stifling him, he flung up his hands and backed off limping.

“Shootin’ lame old ducks ain’t just in my line, an’ I’d certainly hate to hurt ye,” said the young settler grimly as he followed him, across the cabin. “You go an’ set down an’ leave this business to us.”

The disguised master grinned murderously into the face of the younger man.

"Put up yer gun, baby face, an' I'll show you blazin' quick which of us is the man," he mouthed, rage quickening the ordinary slow insolence of his voice.

"Likely ye would. Ye surely scare me," said Jeff disrespectfully.

The posse meantime was securing the prisoners. "What'll we do with this here lame old Santy Claus, Sheriff?" said Jeff without turning his head. "Bring him along?"

The Sheriff glanced round from his occupation in another corner. The murky light showed him nothing beyond the attitude of the two, yet he seemed slow in replying.

"I'll send round a carriage an' pair for him, Jeff, if it will oblige you. Ain't you afraid o' hurting his feelings with those rough tactics o' yours?" There was a sarcastic, doubtful twist on the speaker's mouth; his cap was cocked backward at a challenging angle. "Was he with 'em that night at the bank?"

"Nope, didn't see no grandpaps in that job," responded the settler.

"Well, maybe you was some excited," said the Sheriff tolerantly. He had risen to his full height, and his eyes were flashing inquiringly up and down the singularly powerful bulk of the

white-haired one. "Suppose you step lively here to the light, grandad," he suggested. "I don't seem to see you real well there."

The accumulating suspicion of the remark brought about an instantaneous explosion in the shack. Before a single man of the startled posse could comprehend, the outlaw had turned and in one leap knocked Jeff senseless and gained the door. In that same instant the Sheriff's Colt crashed, and a deep furious oath of pain broke from the figure as it sprang out into darkness.

Yelling "Hardeman" the awakened posse flung pell-mell after it.

But it was much too late. No visible sign appeared, but from the face of the precipice below arose on the wind the smashing sounds of a heavy body falling through the obstructing tree trunks. Right beneath roared the current, and the posse stared down into the blackness with satisfied faces, saying that the fugitive's death was certain.

"Absolutely certain," assented the grim, baffled Sheriff. "The only point that ain't fully settled regardin' that event, boys, is the date. That needs clarifyin' before I bet on it. Let's get this crowd back to Centreville." He ground his jaws together and turned back to the other prisoners. They were furtively exulting, but when he came up and looked them over with his

stern, quiet eyes they repressed their sense of humor and marched down hill before him in gloomy silence.

Meantime the flood had Hardeman in its grasp. Had he been less hardened and desperate than he was, or his muscles a whit less trained it would have carried him over the falls. The Sheriff's bullet had grazed his thigh, and the pain of that hampered his efforts, but he gritted his teeth and fought the currents with a fury as great as theirs, while they tore from him contemptuously his venerable white hair and beard, and tossed him at last on the opposite shore an exhausted and much younger man, safe for the present from pursuit.

He bound up his wound to the best of his ability; it was but a slight one; and then lay in his dripping clothes and slept till dawn. Exposure had no terrors for his constitution of iron. He arose in the early morning, a leader robbed of his band, a fierce, slinking, wild animal, without resources except such as his cunning and strength could win for him, and consuming with the desire for vengeance.

It was not possible to reach the Sheriff. Besides it was highly inadvisable to try. But there were others who could be made to pay at less risk,—Jeff, for instance.

Jeff was poorer sport than Hardeman was per-

sonally interested in, but he suggested an idea. Jeff had a cabin some twelve miles out of Centreville, and in the cabin he had a young wife whom Hardeman knew to be pretty and winsome. And he knew too, that Jeff was forced to spend much time away from his cabin.

The outlaw examined his wounded leg and furiously cursed the Sheriff. "He nearly got me.—The band's broke up too, an' I've got to light out. But I'll knock that Sheriff's reputation, an' I'll spoil Jeff's peace o' mind some afore I go." His wicked face assumed its most satanic expression; passion made his words thick; the lurking fiend in him was fully roused and dominant. "To-night's spree was spoiled, thanks to the Sheriff. What of it? I'll have another an' a better. I'll show 'em now what Hardeman *is*. They need enlightenin', they do. I'll leave my footprints on the sands of time. I've done it afore—an' I'll do it again."

.
Into Centreville one day, a week later, came limping wildly a crazed, pitiful, battered wreck, who wept and pleaded fiercely to see the Sheriff.

"There he is comin', Jeff;—what is it, man?—What's the trouble?" questioned the sympathetic crowd eagerly. But it surged along with him unanswered, Hardeman's name echoing from lip to lip. They knew that kind of trouble.

"Sheriff, for God's sake," cried the raving man. "It's my wife and my baby. Hardeman's killed him—my baby. I came home and saw it. And he's got my wife. I've looked for him two days. But I'm beat. Get your horse."

Jeff fell on his knees exhausted, but clung around the Sheriff's legs, raving and crying. "Take me with you. Damn his black soul—Take me with you."

The Sheriff brought the broken man upright on his feet. The gentleness of his voice was a terrible thing.

"Stand up Jeff, man. Steady! Now, which way did his trail lead?"

"North," said the husband dementedly. "I hope my girl's dead by this time." He wrung his hands and fell to weeping openly. The men swore deep oaths at the sight, for he had been one of them, and his unfortunate plight stirred them to the core.

"Boys, I'll take six of you," said the Sheriff. His voice, though quiet, roused them like a bugle call, and a score rushed upon him, begging and swearing. He chose his six. "Get your guns and horses, we'll start in twenty minutes. Bring along grub for six days."

They cursed him in grim joy. "You'll get him, Sheriff; you'll get the — — this time," and scattered after their horses and guns.

But the stricken man prayed and entreated to be taken also, all useless as he was to this gathering whirlwind of justice. The Sheriff stayed a moment to console him.

"Leave it to us, Jeff. The boys are in a terrible hurry, and if you kept 'em back for one minute you'd never forgive yourself. We'll get him quicker without you."

"You'll bring him back to me, Sheriff!"

"Can't promise that, Jeff. But if I don't you'll know he's in hell," said the Sheriff comfortingly as he strode away.

In less than the twenty minutes the posse had gathered again, every one of the grim-faced men who stayed behind inspecting the riders, eagerly assisting and offering advice.

"How's that pony's foot, Jim? You kin have mine if you want to."—"Going to take the upper trail, Sheriff? Yep—bring you out quicker, an' the ponies 'll stand it all right.—So long—and luck to you!" and they held back the leader's horse by the bit, while they reminded him. "Don't shoot him if you can help it, Sheriff. We'd like to see him first.—But if you do shoot—by thunder, shoot quick," they cried as the posse rattled past toward the upper trail.

"Don't you worry 'bout that, boys," the Sheriff called back. The excitement of the rest seemed not to have touched him; or if it had it

showed only in his greater command of himself and them.

As he rode off, jamming his visored cap down to shade his eyes, the sunshine gleaming on his brown, keen face, he was determined in his heart that this would be his last search for Hardeman. But he felt not an inkling of where the quest would lead him, nor of the novel company in which it would finally reach an end. Sheer excitement over the start caused a bystander to laugh gruffly and confide to his neighbor. "Handsome cuss—darned if he ain't—that Sheriff."

For the posse the quest was shorter than they had anticipated. They found Hardeman's tracks, and next day they found Jeff's wife. Her husband's wish concerning her had come true. She was dead, and the outlaw had left a note with her for the Sheriff, sublimely confident that he would come for it.

"So long, Sheriff," he wrote, "I'm crossing the Columbia. Washington suits my health better than Oregon. You're beat, you long-legged cockerel."

The Sheriff read this missive with a look of profound regret. Then he put it in his pocket and looked round on his dejected posse.

"I reckon you won't be in at the finish, boys. He's crossed the Columbia. I'm real dis-

appointed on your accounts." Grunts of rage and disgust answered him and told him the strength of their feelings. "But I'll bring him to you if he'll come alive," he assured them.

"How! You goin' across into Washington, Sheriff?"

"Sure. Goin' to China and the North Pole if it's necessary. I'm going to get the man that did this thing—" the Sheriff looked down with smouldering eyes, "the man that did this ain't fit to walk this fair earth. I'll get the necessary legal permission and follow him until I get him."

Their confidence in him comforted them somewhat, and with variously expressed emphasis they assented.

"But we'd like to be with you, Sheriff—dog-gone it, we'd like to be with you at the finish," they complained bitterly.

"It won't be possible, boys; I've got a notion he'll strike up north to the Olympics and their wilderness. He'll find plenty of his own sort there." As he spoke the Sheriff took his horse and was ready to depart when he remembered something. "Somebody'd oughter look in and do the right thing for Jeff's little kid. Poor Jeff's so locoed, I guess he's clean forgot that," he said in his gentlest voice.

"All right, Sheriff," they answered heartily. "We'll tend to that. And you?"

“I’ll get right back to Centreville and use the telegraph. I’ll finish the details by morning and get the proper authority to act, and then I’ll take the train north. He won’t beat me by many hours.”

“An’ when you get him, Sheriff—when you get him?” they muttered vengefully.

The Sheriff’s face hardened. “When I get him, boys—” he repeated, the flash of steel glimmering between his narrowing eyelids “When I get him—Ye gods, do you have to ask?” he inquired with the explosive fury of an oath, and then, turning his horse, he galloped rapidly away.

The posse buried Jeff’s wife and later his child, and returned to town in the early hours of the morning. The Sheriff was already gone. Those who had seen him remarked that he had said scarcely a word upon going except, “Poor Jeff, poor Jeff!”

“But if you’d seen his face you’d ’a known Hardeman had reached his limit,” they said. “He ’ll meet up with a hungry grizzly the day he meets that there han’some, easy-going Sheriff—an’ don’t you ferget it.”

CHAPTER II.

THE MOUNTAIN CAMP.

OVER the rugged heights of the Olympic range the blood-red sun hung for a moment like a ball of fire in the shimmering sky, then slowly it dipped behind a granite peak and sank majestically toward the Pacific. Ere it disappeared from view behind the range it cast a last radiant brilliance over the waters of Admiralty Inlet and the busy hustling city of Seattle, built terrace upon terrace upward on the eastern shore. Then it flared its parting light upon the far-famed snow cap of Mount Ranier, leagues beyond and to the south.

Northward the Straits of Juan de Fuca blazed for a moment as its waters seemingly swallowed the departing light that all day long had danced upon its currents. Then British Columbia vanished; and a distant yellow haze proclaimed that Victoria was alight by the hand of man, that darkness was to be met by the light of electricity.

Meanwhile all was hushed in gloom at the base of the Olympics.

Robbed of the sun's rays suddenly and completely, night had hastened in the foothills, while yet the distant shores and the great snow-capped cone of Ranier shone in the full glow of evening light.

The forests of great pine and fir in the foothills were blanketed by a darkness oppressive and fearsome. The night creatures began their cautious movements, and here and there a pair of yellow eyes pierced the gloom and then disappeared at the sudden creak of a bough or the scurrying of some four-footed denizen. Far aloft the swaying of the tree-tops sang the nightly lullaby of the forest.

A few hundred feet above the level of the distant waters was a clearing perched on the rolling top of a foothill, and in this clearing were rude log cabins and ruder men; husky, broad-shouldered fellows, whose faces shone by the light of the camp fire with the color of health and the tan of prolonged exposure.

Surrounded by the dark wall of huge Oregon firs, the men were moving briskly about the clearing. Low words of command came from the one nearest the camp fire, before whom a line of his fellows stood waiting for a moment with something of a rough, military precision. They were all armed—with revolvers, hanging, Western fashion, at the right side, and the short rifle, or

carbine, a weapon well suited to these woods, and of great power and effectiveness.

The leader, Captain Butts, he of the camp fire, was expressing himself primitively but effectively.

"If you boys don't bag a few smugglers this dark night, you're a string of fresh water salmon. Look out for Chinks. There's sure to be a boat load or two land near the point yonder. See you get 'em, and when you do get 'em bring 'em into this camp. And bring in their opium too. —You savvy?"

"Sure we will," came in audible chorus.

"I guess you will," assented the burly commander grimly. "Don't any o' you gents bag a smuggler an' tell me he ain't got the opium. Because if that's the case," and Butts indulged in a pause that was dark with emphasis, "I'll know you *have*—see?"

Beneath the surface good-nature of this plain discourse was earnestness enough to render certain of the men before him uneasy. They were all members of the San Juan de Fuca patrol, whose duty was to catch opium smugglers from British territory, also, incidentally, to look out for Chinamen, known to them as "Chinks," and prevent them from stepping across by the boat-load into Uncle Sam's country from British Columbia. The patrol sincerely tried to exclude

the Orientals, but occasionally if the Chinaman happened to have some good salable opium and a pair of fast running legs they failed. It was peculiarly difficult to hit a Chinaman under such circumstances, especially when his earnest desire was merely to become a good 'Melican man.' Butts had been long enough at the station to know that some of the patrol were growing rich, and he suspected, wise man, that a portion of the opium captured was never reported to him, but was disposed of in the nearby centres of civilization by the dishonest members of the patrol.

The men disappeared by twos and threes through the woods towards the shore. Captain Butts watched them go, and was moved to mutter to himself half admiringly! "The finest set of sons of guns I ever knew,—but hang 'em they like to graft on to the dope fer themselves once in a while." Then he turned westward, and alone made for a point of the shore some distance away.

The lantern he carried was unlighted. After tramping about two miles down a trail that followed the water's edge he ensconced himself in the darkness behind a fallen tree not far from the road and waited.

A storm was due to break before morning, as was foretold by the low moaning voice of the wind, sweeping across the miles of billowing tree

crests aloft. A likely night for smugglers. The patrol would make great efforts he knew. As leader he was ambitious to make a capture alone if possible. It was easier to manage those rough fighting fellows, collected from the four corners of the country, by physical strength and courage and proved resources, than by any amount of words.

Suddenly as the troubled moon cast a dim shadow for a moment across the waters he raised himself slightly and drew his carbine towards him with a swift but silent motion. The moon disappeared again, but the muffled sound of oars came indistinctly on the wind.

"A lone smuggler," he breathed grimly, "Thinks he's got a nice easy job, I presume, landing in this out o' the way little cove. Why, the confidin' cuss must think this patrol is a figger-head to the State o' Washington."

Slowly he crawled on hands and knees to the water's edge, and concealed behind a rock awaited the landing. In a moment the boat rushed upon the pebbles and a man sprang ashore. In the dim light Butts saw a six-footer with athletic frame and body, and square, strong face. He saw too that the stranger was heavily armed.

The size and armament of the man however

had no great effect upon the leader of the patrol. He was used to all kinds of men and guns.

The stranger advanced. That instant Butts leveled his carbine, remarking in a voice that could scarcely be heard ten feet off. "Hands up, stranger—no monkey business."

It had a most wonderful effect upon the unknown. With incredible swiftness he whirled, ducked low, and like a fiend launched himself upon Butts below his leveled gun.

Never before in those parts had a smuggler failed to obey the command of an armed patrolman, but this time it was different. Butts had no time to pull trigger or to reach for revolver before he found himself in the grasp of arms that were crushing the life out of him. He fought back with vicious swings and smashing blows, but he was borne heavily to the ground.

He realized then that he was in the hands of a superior, of one who was bent on murder rather than capture, and who would finish him in short order. Such strength he had never encountered in human being, so he roared for help with fierce reverberating cries that echoed and reechoed along the shores and into the woods; at the same time rolling over and over with his silent adversary, fighting with the desperation of despair. He seized the man's neck and closed with a grip of iron, but he was shaken loose.

Then he staggered to his feet, and the two swayed across the beach in deadly combat at close quarters. Suddenly Butts felt a crashing blow on the head. He trembled, and the light of the night world went out in overwhelming pain, and in a cloud of blackness.

Connor and the Italian, Miguel, both members of the patrol, who were stalking along the road by the Straits, heard the cries of their captain from afar and hastened with all speed towards the scene.

They arrived just as the desperate fight was over. Lighting their small hand lanterns they beheld their chief lying unconscious on the beach, face upward, and showing evidence of severe punishment. In the boat there was nothing. The unknown had either escaped with his load, or, as Miguel suggested, the whole affair looked so like the flight of a desperado that there was probably no load of any kind.

“That man killa anybody. He not smuggle; he one them bada men. Gotta way. Butts mada mistaka.”

Miguel had reference to the rather numerous outlaws who often made for the Olympic range where the mountain fastnesses afforded secure retreat, and where the abundance of wild game insured a plenty of food.

The two carried their chief with difficulty

through the woods. Long before arriving at the clearing they were joined by others of the patrol, who came crashing through the woods by all the known short cuts in answer to the signals of distress. With the powerful strength of woodsmen they rushed the unconscious man to the glare of the camp fire and ministered to his needs in a rough but earnest manner.

Disagreements of daily life, petty jealousies and personal spites were lost in the presence of severe and dire necessity. One and all they forgot Butts' severity. He was their chief, their leader, although a well-nigh dead one, and with one accord they fell to and did what experience had taught them was proper under the circumstances.

Without further ceremony they threw a bucket of water over his head, and Miguel placed a square of salt pork on the back of his neck, while Connor slapped his soles with the handle of an ax.

"He's most gone fer sure," volunteered Jenks of the day patrol.

"He's not gone," answered Connor, "he's simply overcome by the suddenness. We could hear him yelling a mile off; it was an awful fight."

"It sounda lika hella," acquiesced Miguel.

Butts opened his eyes and gazed around at

the men, who welcomed him back to life with joyful exclamations.

"Where's the opium," asked the injured man suddenly.

"Wasn't no opium," answered Connor, "You went up against a desperado, and not a smuggler."

Butts sat up. "See here, don't you give me any bluff. Who found me?"

"Me and the Italian," nodded Connor.

"Produce the drug."

"None to produce," laughed Connor.

The dazed Butts rose, seizing the ax-handle, and felled first Connor and then Miguel. Fight gleamed from his pale and ghastly face as he lunged menacingly toward the rest, but they overpowered him and bore him, limp as a rag, into the cabin to his bunk.

Connor sat up and washed his bleeding head without apparent malice.

"The boss thinks we're stealing opium all the while," he remarked with a sickly smile. "He won't stand fer any more graft, boys;" and they all grinned half guiltily at the speaker. Miguel voiced the general sentiment as he seized the salt pork and clapped it on to his aching head, and rolling over on the ground remarked disgustedly:

"Butts he damma bada proposition."

The day shift, now thoroughly awake, joined the night squad around the fire and fell to discussing the mystery of the assault. That their chief was no infant in strength they could testify; the more therefore they admired the awful prowess of his assailant. They made known in language strong and emphatic their earnest desire to meet with him.

Tom Jones, a loose-limbed, heavy footed giant who lay sprawled on his belly, amusing himself throwing twigs in the fire while the others talked, rose up on one elbow and doubted it in a tremendously earnest bass voice.

"You fellows 'r all blowin' 'bout what you'd be liable to do if you flopped up against that gentleman o' the row boat. You've all got dreams, I say."

"Dreams," they echoed, "What you mean! Dreams?"

"Yah—dreams. Think you'd do stunts, don't you? You's sick in yer upper stories. That fellow is no smuggler. You know that. Smugglers don't put up a fight; they divide the opium. Now this fellow was business from start to finish. He was out fer trouble."

At this moment a Chinaman, one of the cooks, came softly from the cabin where Butts was being cared for, and squatted near the circle. He had a peculiar expression on his tanned Ce-

lestial face, and those around the fire divined in an instant that he had important news, but was waiting to be asked.

Jones sat up and fumbled with his carbine, then looking across the fire remarked in a long drawl:

"If you silent Mongolian don't break yer silence pretty doggone quick I'll pinkey yer stomach with a piece o' lead outer this gun."

Yang Foo, for such was the cook's name, took a long breath, and instinctively slid his hand over his stomach, looking appealingly and beseechingly at the others. He got no encouragement, however; and a second speaker with mock seriousness suggested that they all "pinkey" some lead into his stomach.

The Oriental winced and then decided to take chances. "You plinkee lead in my tлумmick you gettee onlee lice."

"Lice in his stomach," guffawed a new member of the squad.

"Lice nothing. He's a Chink an' queer on his letters. He means rice," explained Jones.

"Yess," lisped Yang Foo, "no goodee plinkee me."

"That's right," they bawled in chorus. "Lead wouldn't hurt such an innocent as you, you pig-tailed secret bearer. Out with it Yang—Quick! !"

Yang looked solemn, and swaying his body sideways, began in a sing-song voice:

"Buttsee say he got lickee bly a gleet tallee 'Melican man. Yang Foo was lookee lound in Seattle las' Monday, an' Seattle was lookee lound findee big 'wayman, namee Lardyman. He lunnee 'way flom Olegon."

The men listened attentively to the Chinaman's sing-song statement, and when it was finished there was a thoughtful silence, broken by Jenks, one of the younger fellows.

"I'm from Oregon, boys, as you know. The Chink says Seattle was looking 'round for a highwayman by the name of Lardyman, escaped from Oregon. He means the biggest desperado of the Northwest—Hardeman."

Every man pulled himself to a sitting posture, and instinctively felt for his small arms. They knew the import of that statement; for the name was familiar to all of them, and the deeds perpetrated by this man were passed from camp to camp throughout both Oregon and Washington.

Then Yang Foo commenced again, swaying his body in rhythmic accord to his words.

"Lardyman lunne 'way in boatee, 'Melican man in Seattle say."

"Ran away in a boat, did he? He's the man that got Butts, boys," said Jones with convic-

tion. "Better keep your eyes peeled now. There'll be something doing round here before long."

The fitful moon had long since gone in. The sky above the clearing was black with banked clouds, and the roar of the wind in the tree-tops was like the rushing of a torrent. Vivid flashes of lightning burst forth, paling the camp-fire and lighting up, with unearthly distinctness, the jagged peaks around; and then down came the rain, at first in wind driven drops, then in sheets that obscured all vision and speedily extinguished the fire, driving the men to the shelter of the cabin.

The captain, awakened by the uproar, was quickly made to understand the probable identity of the lone smuggler whose attempted arrest had been followed by such unexpected and painful results. The name of Hardeman was balm to Butts' pride in himself. Plainly it had re-established his wounded credit with the patrolmen. Swinging his legs sullenly out of the bunk "The deuce—where's that Chink?" he demanded fiercely.

Yang Foo, half intimidated by his own sudden importance, repeated his sing-song recital.

"Hardeman, eh—?" and the leader mouthed the name in a sort of savage amiability; then he whirled unsteadily on the young man from Ore-

gon. "Ever see that fellow, Jenks. What's he like?"

"Seen him once in Wasco county, where I come from," said Jenks. "He's tall, and fine-limbed, Chief. Big, six foot two and maybe more, and walks sorter—wa'll, sorter elegant an' almighty. He's got a fine face, and he's quick enough to knock the claws off a wild cat. You'd reckon he was a mighty interestin' acquaintance if you didn't know him. But he's the slickest animal this side of the Rockies—especially with the women."

The torches lit up the circle of shrewd rugged faces, all deeply intent on this description of the great outlaw who had honored the wilds of the Olympics with his presence. Commander Butts banged his fist against his open palm, crying vehemently, "We'll drive the slick cuss back to Oregon.—Or we'll string him up in these woods, eh, boys?"

"Naw," interrupted Jenks enigmatically, "you won't drive him back to Oregon."

"We won't? Why not?" they cried, wheeling on him.

"Because he's *afraid*. That's why."

"*Afraid?* Hardeman afraid of Oregon?"

"Nope. He ain't afraid of Oregon, or any other state I've heard tell of. He's afraid of just one man in Oregon though."

"Who in thunder—?" they inquired half sarcastically.

"The Sheriff of Wasco."

The captain's face gathered into a thoughtful frown. "I've heard of that son of a gun. He's more talked of than the devil himself in Wasco. Reg'ler——, they say he is."

"That what they say? *Well now—*" and Jenks swallowed a sound like a delighted chuckle. "I'm from Wasco myself," he said proudly; "and I've heard by letter that the Sheriff is after Hardeman. Coming into Washington, acting under special papers. I'll bet he's on the fugitive's trail now, an' that's what made that outlaw so darned hurried. Turr'ble serious cuss, the Sheriff is, when he gets down to business——"

A knocking at the cabin door interrupted Jenk's eulogy, and two Indians stalked majestically in from the storm, the older dressed as a chief and still a young man, the other a handsome youth in his teens, evidently his son.

"*How*, Chief Talabam. What brings you here to-night—you and Chidwan?" queried the captain.

"Chidwan heard the fight, and he told his Chief father. Talabam comes as the white man's friend to see Chief Butts. Chidwan said the Chief was hit in the head."

The patrolmen grinned, and the Indian's face lit with the suspicion of a grim smile.

"Hit all over, Talabam," muttered Butts disgustedly. "It was Hardeman who did it—the great outlaw from Wasco."

"Wasco," said the Indian with interest. "In Wasco are many bad men. Do the white brothers know that Talabam, Chief of the Yakimas, lived in Wasco when he was a small brave—smaller than Chidwan? Talabam knows of Wasco."

The Indian was besieged with questions at once, but he knew nothing much of recent doings in Oregon. Listening attentively to the discussion he seated himself, shaking his head grimly.

"If from Wasco is coming a brave who seeks this bad man, and if this brave needs a swift foot and a strong eye to help him, send to Chief Talabam, for the Chief of the Yakimas has many braves, and the red man likes not the bad white man."

"We will," echoed the men heartily. "We'll send the new Sheriff of Wasco—he's coming himself."

The eyes of the Indian glittered, and his face turned to a sphinx-like quiet. They all knew him and understood that something had come suddenly to him. No use asking what—so they waited. After a long pause Talabam arose; all

the dignity of the Chief was in him; all the grace and force of his aristocratic tribe was his.

“Send the new Sheriff to the Chief of the Yakimas. The new man hunter is young as the half grown tree. He is quick as a flash from the clouds, and strong as the great fir; and his heart is the heart of a great white man. Talabam says this—for Talabam has heard and knows.” There was a curious ring in the Indian’s voice, a something that betokened deeper things unexplained.

“Hooray for the Chief!” yelled Jenks. “Say Tally, you’re a dead game sport, if you do look like the top of a one cent piece.”

The chief grinned approvingly. “Talabam speaks not of one cent piece. When he speaks he speaks in gold.”

The men laughed. It was well known that the chief was an Indian Cræsus. As he spoke he drew from his belt a handful of nuggets.

“These are Talabam’s words,” he said, “will the white brothers play poker?”

They played until dawn and until there was nothing more to bet save their clothes and arms; then Talabam took his departure, as usual, laden with coin.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW BOSS.

FAR out beyond the western end of the mountain chain, on a rocky shore beside the great Pacific, a lone mining camp lay as though it had been dropped from the clouds.

Its natural environments were extremely beautiful—blue mountains rising solemnly behind, a sky of sapphire blue overhead in which the white sun of midsummer burned fiercely, and at its feet the cool blue waters of the broad Pacific. Beauty, however, was not a matter of much consideration to the camp. It was there for business; and to that primary cause and aim of its existence it attended with the usual ugly, self-absorbed, vehement manner of mining camps.

It was too small to have attractions of its own, or to evolve them in any great degree; and it was too far from the large centres of life to make it a desirable home for pleasure seekers. The men who came there came for strict business, though this might happen to be of different kinds, according to the nature of the men. The

officials of the mine, the Boss and his assistants, were always armed, by day and night; the miners never; though some of them had the air of men who would draw weapon on slight provocation. Questions about the past were usually unpopular among them, and were seldom asked; it was enough that they were able to work, for the Boss was the kind of man who saw to it that they fulfilled that requirement.

In the usual unobtrusive way of new-comers to that camp, a stranger appeared from nowhere one day, and asked for work.

The Boss, who was a judge of men, measured him for a second or two with a critical eye. The stranger was young, but there was something in his adventurous dark face, in the sleeping force of his powerful body, that indicated a wide experience not common to youth. His somewhat forced servility was of the fierce slinking kind a wolf might wear when anxious for cover.

"'Fraid we ain't got nothing fancy enough fer your taste, stranger," grimly suggested the Boss. "What sorter job d'you want?"

"The one that draws the biggest pay," said the other with irrepressible insolence.

"Ye don't get it. Not while I'm on the pay roll."

"I'd just as soon wait. What's the job of Boss to these here diggin's worth?" There was a

wickedly braggart curl on the stranger's mouth, and the eyes of the man in authority ran him over a second time even more discerningly. The Boss was a strong man himself; and he read an iron character in this one who came begging for work with one hand hooked in his belt just above his blue gleaming weapon. Assurance and a fierce air of accustomed dominance over men gave the lie to his smirking humility, no less surely than did his insolent tongue. But the Boss needed just such fellows in his business—as allies of his own authority.

“You give up yer gun when you come to work in these diggin's, stranger.”

“I do—eh? Say, you surprise me. Which end 'll you take?”

The applicant for work stood with the Colt poised in his hand, and his voice was a wonder for its steely, treacherous smoothness. Even the iron-nerved Boss inadvertently stepped back a pace.

“Ye'll do,” he laughed gruffly. “I'll make you foreman—an' keep yer gun, you devil. I'd oughter throw you over the ledge instead. What d'ye call yerself?”

The newly-employed slipped back his weapon with a hypocritical leer of gratitude and a certain virile grace born of great strength. “You can call me Scott. I reckon I'll remember to answer

to that. An' any time you want to try throwin' me over the ledge—don't you hesitate, Boss. I'm as harmless as a spring chicken, I am," he responded with an amiable swagger.

Whatever the new foreman knew or did not know concerning mining, it rapidly developed that in handling men he was an expert trained by some past experience. The hardiest characters in the mine, drawn thither by its retirement from civilization and law, flinched when his fierce eye rested on them. The Boss was the only law for the mining camp. But within three days the new foreman had divided the prerogative with him, and killed a miner on sight for a moment's insubordination. The irregularity was necessarily winked at, however. The foreman was startlingly well fitted for his work, and it was manifestly the least difficult course with a man of his impressive attainments.

On the fifth day he was called to a consultation by his superior.

"Comp'ny's comin': the inspector an' one o' the mine owners, Mr. John Thorn from Seattle. He's bringin' his daughter along. She's a real refined lady, she is; the sort this crowd don't see once in a thousand years, so hurry up an' have everythin' slick. An' say—don't you get too doggone playful with that there gun o' yours. You'll make a scandal first thing, you devil."

Under the able persuasion of the foreman things were slick in an astonishingly short space. He had his own curiosity to see the lady, a curiosity which forced immurement with his own sex had keenly whetted, and sent him about his duties with strong speculation in his bold eyes. It happened, however, that long before she came the dense fog of the Pacific coast had fallen on the place, and threatened to balk him of his desire.

Circumstances were unkind to him. The moment of her arrival found him detained at the further end of the camp. Hearing the clatter of hoofs and the stentorian voice of the Boss shouting a hasty command, he made for the place with all the speed he dare muster without attracting unwelcome notice. But outside the office he found only three horses, blanketed in the fog. The girl had vanished within, leaving behind her on the thick atmosphere the trail of a sweet feminine presence, that floated, perfume like, over the camp's crude, rough edged masculinity. Some speech of her escorts' made her laugh, and the silvery notes of her voice struck the auditory nerve of the foreman with a light pleasant shock, and traveling thence to his brain diffused an agreeable glow throughout his strenuous evil body. Tingling in every nerve and muscle with desire to see her, he prowled about the vicinity

of the building, licking his lips occasionally in the excitement of delayed anticipation.

Secure in the lighted office with her father and his armed employees, she knew no more of his wolfish existence than of his burning curiosity concerning her, and would have scorned him daintily if she had.

Lunch was served to the party in the office, so he had to wait a long time. But he was patient.

To take advantage of his position as foreman, and manufacture an errand which would bring him into her presence, was an expedient he thought of and dismissed. Not from lack of audacity, but from constitutional wariness, which was one of his characteristics. Already he had a half-formed purpose in mind, which sooner or later he might see fit to execute, and this made it advisable that he should curb his vehemence and keep himself in the background.

It was this consideration which still held him bound and harmless when she came out again at last, her three escorts about her. In the doorway she paused for a moment in an endeavor to pierce the fog bank, and from where he stood half hidden he had a dim but most satisfying impression of a rather tall girl, with wonderful blue eyes and dark hair, and of a beauty that sent his wicked soul half mad. Her clear round voice flicked his throbbing senses anew as she passed him without

a glance, without even knowing it was a man who stood there half revealed in the murk. Again in her wake floated that ineffable, subtle perfume—as of a thousand woodland flowers; and as the faint whiff of it stole about his nostrils and reached his brain it well nigh unseated the iron caution that reigned there, holding sway over all his instincts. His arteries pounding tumultuously in his skull, he reached with a lightning swift, stealthy motion sidewise, and stood there poised, ready for instant murder, yet deterred still by judgment. Then, on second thought, and with a fierce gesture, he slipped back the pistol and grunted in scorn of his own haste. Of what use was it? There was plenty of time,—days, weeks, months, if he preferred. Time was his servant. Was he a half-grown puppy to swallow his pleasure thus at one gulp.

He heard her laughing voice declaring as she rose lightly to her saddle: “Come father, now we’re off for Hilltown and our little cabin in the woods. Doesn’t that make you happy? Father tried to leave me at home when he came here, you see, but he wasn’t clever enough,” she explained with sweet-voiced wilfulness. “I love this beautiful country. I love the bigness and wildness of it. And as for the men—I’m sure the most of them are good, are they not?” she inquired in happy sincerity of the grim-faced Boss.

"Sure they are. I'd like to see any of 'em misbehavin' himself in presence of a lady," said the Boss with energy.

"You'd be quite safe anyway, whatever the circumstances," said the charmed inspector, touching his big Colt.

She laughed sweetly at them both. "Thanks! You look dreadfully fierce with those huge revolvers. You ought to see father with one."

"*Myra!*" objected that stout, amiable gentleman.

"Oh yes, father. I've seen you, so I know all about it," she protested. "I like a little bit of danger. It makes things interesting—as long as you escape, of course—" the pleasant sound of her voice faded amid the clatter of hoof beats; the three visitors rode off, and the fog-bound mining camp seemed lonelier and drearier for the silence.

Full of his dark, over-heated thoughts the foreman slunk away unnoticed to his duties.

A second visit from the inspector was not to be looked for in less than a month, so that evening the Boss prepared to relax somewhat from the cares of his office. He was a stern, strong man with only one weakness—whisky; which he indulged at favorable moments such as this. To-day especially, with his new foreman in charge, he had no fear that discipline would suffer.

He transferred his responsibilities without a doubt; and so he knew nothing of it when the inspector, an over-zealous man, returned that same night to camp after seeing Mr. Thorn and his daughter to the woodman's cabin, some miles away, where they were to spend the night. Long ere the Boss awoke in the morning the inspector had departed again. But the faithful foreman was there, watching his awakening superior with a sardonic grin, the last smirk of his counterfeit humility replaced by open insolence.

"What are you doin' here?" demanded the Boss sharply, as he realized it.

The foreman chuckled aloud in enjoyment.

"Say, don't you speak to me like that. I'm liable to blow yer brains out. I'm waitin' fer you to wake up, you drunken loafer. I'm the Boss now—an' you're nobody. Read that."

"That" was a letter of dismissal from the inspector, who also informed the deposed man that Mr. Scott, his efficient foreman, had been promoted to the place.

The sobered Boss looked up, and beholding that worthy grinning in diabolic entertainment, reached with a growl of rage for his gun. The same instant there was a flash, his arm dropped helplessly against his side with the bone splintered, and the Colt flew from his benumbed fingers—but his foreman stood there unmoved,

weapon in hand, his smile only a trifle uglier and more diabolic.

"You git," said he without preface.—"Git!" and at the smooth, staccato terror of his voice a chill fell on the old Boss.

"I'm the New Boss. I'll give you ten minutes to clear out. Don't fool. I ain't usually so patient," he added, with a suave fiendish sort of toleration.

"You mean you'll murder me, you devil," breathed the elder man.

The answer was an eloquent chuckle, as the New Boss hooked one leg over a chair and sat down facing his former chief across its back. His swagger was that of a man who knows the winning cards are his.

"You just keep on waitin' an' you'll get my meanin'. I've given you ten minutes to get your arm bandaged.—Savvy? Time's flyin'; but if you ain't in a hurry I certainly ain't," said the slow, wickedly musical voice.

There ensued a final deadly pause of several seconds, while the deposed Boss looked in his foreman's eyes and saw the devil lurking there. He perceived that there was no limit to that devil's potentialities. And he noted with renewed and startled appreciation the long sinewy body, gracefully inert, but formidable in its dumb threat of strength. He wondered he had not

foreseen this danger. Then, time being precious, he went slowly out backwards, his face towards the villainous figure in the chair, and the menacing revolver point,—and sought the necessary aid of the miners who had gathered without. Ten minutes later he was gone; and the men, with eyes of curious, awed expectancy, awaited the orders of the New Boss. With them it was clearly a case of “The King is dead. Long live the King.”

Since they had already been granted a taste of his quality as foreman and found it none too promising, they waited in proper trepidation to see what manner of Boss he should prove himself to be. The next few days left room for considerable speculation. To their amazement and great joy he seemed lenient. So much so indeed, that they doubted whether his strange gentleness, which yet was not so reassuring to them as it might have been, was due to a sudden weakening on his part, or only to preoccupation with some other affair, which was evidently engrossing his attention. His interest in the mine was the slightest, and he went about with an intent introspective look on his swarthy face, apparently oblivious of their doings.

The real cause of this abstracted air was that before his mind's eye there flitted constantly the image of a blue-eyed, dark-haired woman, as far

above him as the stars of heaven. Every remembered tone of her voice, every turn of her dimly perceived beautiful body proclaimed her distance from such men as he; but this was the spur that pricked his fancy and drove him on to thoughts and schemes all having for their ultimate object possession—the possession of the apparently unattainable.

Not knowing him very thoroughly, the miners after a day or two forgot their past lesson.

It was well to go carefully, however, considering his possibilities, so they refrained at first from any open insubordination; but there were ominous and secret talks among them and much hatching of plots, the aim of which was the testing of the New Boss's character more fully. These men were not of a calibre to work unless work was really necessary, and he was apparently so abstracted that the opinion quickly grew that he might be "easy," despite his recent show of strength.

A band of the most desperate characters in camp burst in on him unexpectedly one evening when he was standing unarmed in one of the sheds.

"To blazes with workin' in these dogrotted diggin's," muttered the leader, truculently advancing. "It's the end of the world. These here hulks move eastward tomorrer—you hear?"

The New Boss suddenly found himself confronting some half dozen or more of angry men, plainly resolved on trouble. His weapon was on a shelf near the door, which they had slammed shut behind them; so he was hemmed in with them without any advantages whatever. But if there was any thought of fear in him his grim physique did not betray it.

"You genteel baby,—you windy ballon," he responded with fierce, low-pitched eloquence "you dainty quitter, you keep on workin' or *you'll* go to blazes, an' go quick. That's what!" He stood intrenched behind a small table and looked darkly across it, fixing the disgruntled miner with his glowering stare.

The half dozen other men lurched threateningly towards him. He veered round and faced them.

"You dig until yer contract expires; an' you bring all the yellow you find here to this shack—an' mind you, no stealing." His features set rigidly as he spoke; his eyes were cold and steely, his muscles taut, ready for the first motion of offense.

The leader of the men again addressed him.

"The grub's bum. The air ain't fit to breathe. The mine's the end of the earth. There's no wimmen here."

"The Boss smiled sarcastically.

"You're a lot of ex-convicts, every one o' you,

and you think you'd like a little vacation lolling round here while the Company feeds you. You're lookin' fer entertainment from the dear ladies, and maybe a quart or so of rum every day. Maybe I'll get a boatload of wimmen fer you from Victoria or Seattle. But you'll get no rum. That's too expensive.—Savvy? And ye'll work, an' the quicker the better. And say, you keep this in yer minds"—his voice sank to a low impressive note sharpened with deadly menace—"I'm the Boss; an' the Boss is the law,—an' the *only* law in this land."

He moved disdainfully away as he spoke, nearer to the door; but the men, recovering, saw a chance to even up.

"To hell with the law!" cried the leader, throwing himself upon the tall, easy moving figure. The men closed round them. There was a furious shock; then the leader caromed against the wall, but the others crashed impetuously upon the Boss.

His back against the side of the hut, his face streaming with moisture, his chest heaving, his eyes ablaze, he met them. His arms shot forth with indescribable rapidity, his shoulders hunched, his body lunged, and the mass was broken. One man lay stunned, head downward across a chair, another sprawled on the floor. But the others came on.

The leader again lurched forward. The Boss side-stepped and bringing his fist across the man's neck sent him down in a heap. Seizing a chair he swung it on high and sent it whirling toward the light. It missed. A miner seized the lantern and placed it on the shelf out of harm's way and the rush began again.

They crushed the Boss to the floor this time. With blood streaming from his mouth and nose he arose and brought two to the floor with him, but again they overpowered him by sheer force of numbers. Then they released him and laughed at him. They prodded him and kicked him and asked him about the law.

He slouched shamefacedly towards the door, and making a sudden reach overturned a box on the shelf. Next instant he stood erect and strong in the doorway, his heavy Colt in his hand.

"Yes, boys," he cried, as he spat the blood from his mouth, "the law is a good thing. It was six to one, and ye would-be gentlemen of leisure done it beautifully. Now, by hell, it's six to six; just enough to go round.

A deafening crash rent the sodden air and the leader fell dead across the table. Again came the flash, and the roar. Again and again.

Two of the miners had escaped by the window meanwhile. The Boss, reloading his weapon,

sauntered outside, leaving the dead and the wounded within. He stood unconcernedly to meet the rush of the miners outflowing from the darkening surroundings.

They gathered around him angrily but awe-struck.

"A little insubordination, gentlemen," he announced with a contemptuous grin. "You can bury the four later on together. The first off will have to wait for the other three—they ain't all ready yet. An' remember, you dogs, it was six to one at first. But the law wins; an' I'm the law in this here lone an' desolate camp. Back to the 'burrows.'"

Two men stepped out at his command to await the deaths within the hut. The others turned and disappeared whence they had come.

Then the New Boss smiled grimly once more, and lighted a foul-smelling cigar which he took from his trousers' pocket.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed sibilantly between his teeth. "Damn it; I love it. It's so easy to command these devils. But it takes an ex-convict to do it. They'll bring the gold in now all right," he chuckled to himself. "Gold—that's what I need. I'll take a trip termorrow an' see the sights. I'll make a flyin' visit over to the locality o' that place, Hilltown. I've got that Thorn

beauty on my mind—an' got her bad. Say Scott—otherwise Hardeman of Oregon—there ain't no Sheriffs worryin' you up here; you'll have the time of yer life, you will."

CHAPTER IV.

MR. THORN'S DAUGHTER.

A FEW miles eastward of the patrolmen's camp and higher in the foothills was the picturesque, primitive woodland village of Hilltown. The houses were an aggregation of mere log cabins, enlarged and improved beyond the ordinary, laid out in a wide clearing, and facing the rising sun.

The houses were perhaps two score in number, and in their midst was one more ornamental and spacious than its neighbors. It was the town hall and general meeting place, and on Sundays served as a church. Women and children were the chief inhabitants of Hilltown in the day time; but at dusk the men returned from the forests and the farm lands below in the valleys, and gave additional life to the place.

Hilltown was one of the few settlements that dotted the foothills of the great Olympics. Here and there were others scattered along the trail—named by ambitious courtesy a road—that wound uphill and down dale, and further west skirted the shore below the clearing of the pa-

trolmen's camp. This road was a highway towards the western end of the range, and was used considerably by the lumbermen and settlers thereabouts.

Hilltown was the popular resort for the patrolmen when off duty, and when iron circumstances prevented their getting across the water to Seattle. Recently there were still others who found it popular. Situated as it was amid such magnificent surroundings of dense forests and rolling hills, it had attracted the eyes of several wealthy citizens from the hustling city across the inlet. These had built pretentious log cabins, and with their families made their summer home for a few weeks each year in the camp at the foot of the mountains.

Thus it came about that in one of the largest and most modern of these cabins there sojourned Mr. John Thorn, one of Seattle's wealthiest citizens, and his family, consisting in some degree of himself, but most conspicuously of his daughter, that blue-eyed, dark-haired maiden who had accompanied him, half against his parental will and judgment, on his trip to the mining camp of the Pacific coast.

Her offense was really a pardonable one however, and it stood in daily danger of being repeated, for the father and daughter were boon companions. This was their summer holiday,

and they might be seen roaming the forests and the foothills together any day, blissfully content with one another's society. Back in the city, the girl, a rich man's daughter, as well as lovely and winsome in herself, had as many admirers as was advisable for one young lady. None of them was indispensable to Myra's happiness, however. Her father, she laughingly declared, was the only beau who appealed to her, and the only one who dared give her so much trouble watching his movements lest he start off on one of his many expeditions without her.

On his part Mr. Thorn was devotedly content. His daughter was all he had in the world. Considerations of beaux and marriage opened up before the old gentleman a prospect of such great loneliness that he willingly postponed them; although he had ideas of his own on the subject, strong ones, too, in which his daughter did not participate. Every woodman and patrolman about Hilltown knew the pair, and Myra with her smiling woman's eyes and countless feminine graces dear to the heart of man, was the hopeless admiration of all those staunch masculine bosoms in the camp of Commander Butts.

John Thorn was fifty, stout and good-natured, but none too stout or wealthy to swing along a few miles on the trail with a woodman or a patrolman for a companion. He knew how to

meet these rough-bodied, rough-mannered, good hearted men; and they looked upon him with respect and friendship, and were proud of his wealth and his genuine democratic tendencies. And they were proud of him because he was the father of the finest girl in the country, as they described her.

Two weeks after the captain's experience with the outlaw Hardeman, and after all the talk concerning his doings and his whereabouts had died away in Hilltown and the neighboring settlements, Mr. John Thorn desired to take another journey, this time in connection with other mining properties of his at a distance; and he preferred for some good reason of his own to go alone.

Early morning found him seated on a large flat rock near the highway, ready to signal the stage, which could be heard rumbling from afar in the clear mountain air. Beneath his coat swung the ever-present revolver, the constant companion of every man in that rough primitive country. Suddenly he rose at the call of a silvery feminine voice and smiled half guiltily as he beheld his daughter coming rapidly down the trail from the settlement, picking her way gracefully and skillfully between boulders and over tree trunks. On her arm swung a jacket to match the dark walking skirt of heavy gray material, trimmed with

unpretentious braid. A beautiful girl, and she ruled the old gentleman somewhat mercilessly but always in such a fashion as kept him content and delighted under her tender domineering.

"Father I caught you—you old fox. You thought you'd get away without my knowing it, didn't you now?" she exclaimed laughingly as she reached him, and seating herself on the rock, looked beamingly at him.

"I had a sneaking suspicion I might," he answered rather shamefacedly, "but I couldn't, evidently."

"'Course you couldn't. I'm going!"

"Going,—where?"

"Where you're going, wherever that is. You don't suppose for a moment I'm going to stay here all day alone, do you, father?"

He bit his lip. "You can't go. I'm going after a mine, Myra. I've got to hustle and do strenuous things in the next two days. I want to come back by the return stage."

"That'll suit me," she laughed. "I'll chaperon you. There is a highwayman somewhere around, and he might get you if you went alone."

"Talk sense, Myra," said her parent. "Here comes the stage. Good-bye, darling," and he stooped to kiss her.

But she laughingly slid out of his reach, ad-

justing her hat which had become loosened in her chase to overtake him.

“No ‘good-bye, darling,’ for me, Pop—I’m going,” and her round chin rose smilingly in air, and he knew he was beaten.

“Got to call up my authority, or I can’t do a thing with her,” mused Mr. John Thorn. He attempted to look sour; but was unsuccessful. Then he bit off the end of a cigar, and absent-mindedly flung the cigar away in his dilemma.

“My, but you’re rattled,” said the girl soberly. “Father,” she wheedled sweetly, “don’t be stubborn. How would you feel if I sneaked off and deserted you in this lonesome place for half a week? You wouldn’t like it specially well.—Ah, here’s the stage.”

Obediently Mr. Thorn got into the vehicle after his daughter. They were alone in it, and, lighting a cigar properly this time, he observed her for a moment and remarked seriously:

“You can go as far as Butts’ camp and come back to-night on the regular down stage. You’ve got to do as I tell you this time, Myra.”

The lady tapped her heel against the floor and thought it over for a minute. Her father was really concerned, it appeared, so she dutifully capitulated.

“All right, father. It’s going to be lonesome, but I’ll do any little thing like that for you.

But," and here she fired a gun for another battle, which was a standing one—"I can't oblige you in that other business. I won't marry the man of your choice, I give you advance notice. He won't suit me, I know."

Mr. Thorn winced. The shot was well directed. There was a certain rich and influential business man at home who had been paying Myra some attention. Although she cared not the snap of a twig for the gentleman as a husband, her father had favored him somewhat mildly, hoping for a change of heart in his daughter. But he would not have pushed her for the world. Now he thought for several minutes, and then looked lovingly at her.

"When you get married, marry any straight gentleman you want; but don't leave me alone in my old age, Myra. Give me a bunk and a cosy chair; but don't give me the shake—that's all."

She flung herself upon his shoulders and kissed him, the tears standing in her eyes.

"You're a goose. Why, when I marry I'll choose a European nobleman with a title as long as a fence rail, an aristocratic nose and an empty pocket-book—and we'll live off your money. *And* get a divorce some day."

Her absurdity and her affection lured him back to his wonted gayety. Laughing, and with her

head on his shoulder, they began to talk of the beauties of a nearby cascade dashing down to the straits from the high regions above.

"Great, isn't it, Myra? And to think a beautiful country like this is so little known," he exclaimed in ecstasy.

"It's lovely; lovely," she echoed. "Only it's going to be a wee bit lonely till you come back, Pop. Don't let anything happen to you," and thus they confabbed until the stage stopped at a settler's cabin near the camp and Myra alighted to make her headquarters with the good-natured woodman's wife until the evening stage would take her back to Hilltown.

"So long, father," she cried, as she waved her hand and threw a kiss at Mr. John Thorn in the coach. He returned the salutation immediately, and lying back against the forward corner of the seat, soliloquized: "If some fellow doesn't fall in love with that girl of mine pretty soon, I'll chew my hat. She's the limit, even if I do say it; she's the absolute image of her dear mother."

That afternoon Captain Butts was drowsily meditating on a log near the culinary quarters, wherein Yang Foo was chanting unintelligible Chinese, when he heard a voice.

"Goodness, is everybody on this earth asleep? And we came up to be amused." Swinging round he beheld at the edge of the clearing the laughing

critic, with two little children from the cabin just below.

"Great Scott, I wasn't asleep," said the husky captain, springing up. He shouted so loudly to Yang Foo to bring a chair for the visitor that the hurrying Celestial tripped up his friend Yang Ko, the other cook, in his excitement. Ko carelessly let the end of his queue fall into the open stove and went out of the door with a bound, the knot in his pig tail aflame and a couple of hounds after him.

"Gracious—the poor man," cried Myra uncertainly.

Butts grabbed the cook by the back of the neck and smothered the sizzling appendage. Then he apologetically explained to Miss Myra that two Chinese cooks in one camp were two too many; and the pair of Celestials trotted back to the kitchen, highly indignant, and in reprisal burned the camp's dinner.

"Glad to see you, Miss Thorn," said the captain earnestly if belatedly. "This camp certainly does appreciate the honor. Those men of mine—" but they cut him short by the haste with which they came to speak for themselves.

"Fancy Chinamen as alarm clocks," laughed Myra slyly, "and they always seemed so quiet and unobtrusive too."

"That there chair," said Jenks of Oregon in-

dignantly, "ain't the sort this camp oughter offer a lady to set on. Jones, where's that big bear-skin o' yours you never could get no right use fer? Waitin' to be asked fer it, are you?" And they throned Myra, protesting, blushing and flattered, on the great bear-skin, and pressed into service the brand-new dipper to fetch her water from the spring.

Their eager admiration testified whether or no they found her charming as she sat there with the sunlight on her fair, piquant face, the two little ones beside her solemnly eyeing the ring of stalwart, handsomely muscular fellows, each anxious to get the princess' eye and to be more gallant than his neighbor.

"Father's gone off prospecting, and left me at home," she said. "Guess he was just afraid. That outlaw has demoralized all the neighborhood."

"Pshaw—that outlaw? He's gone. He's eloped with himself. Found he'd made a mistake in his locality. Say, you don't suppose he'd want to stay round here after he'd seen *us*, do you?" they inquired joyfully.

"Well no, I really shouldn't think so," she agreed, "I'm sure he wouldn't if he met your Chinamen."

They thumped each other in their approval of

her. "Dern fool Chink; we'll cut his pig-tail off," they threatened delighted. "Oughtn't to have a pig-tail if he can't keep it outer mischief."

"It's funny about that outlaw too," they said, coming back to the subject. "Here's Jenks tellin' how there's a fire-eatin' Sheriff from Wasco county campin' on his trail, an' we ain't seen either o' them."

"Well, I'm sure we don't want to," said the girl with a mock shudder, "at least not unless we meet them both together."

"Well now, that's what we're liable to, accordin' to Jenks. He thinks his Sheriff is just the salt o' the earth."

"Does he?" she said interested. "Who is your Sheriff, Mr. Jenks?" and the patrolman, pleased because the princess' blue eyes were bent on him, told her some things that he knew and very much more that his admiration imagined concerning the Sheriff of Wasco.

"Mercy," she laughed, "I'm not sure but I'd rather meet Mr. Hardeman himself than your Sheriff. I'm afraid of him already." But somewhere at the back of her eyes the spirit of conquest danced as she looked at the big patrolman and listened to his defense.

"Sho'! He wouldn't harm a hair of your head. He's a gentleman. He was born an' bred in the West, an' knows how to treat a lady. But

he sure has no use for that outlaw Hardeman," said Mr. Jenks eagerly.

Miss Thorn shrugged her pretty shoulders. "We'll see. Captain Butts and his camp certainly know how to treat a lady at least," and her smiling lips flattered every man of them in turn, "I'll send the Sheriff to them if he needs instructing."

And yet somehow it seemed as though she would fain have the teaching of that object lesson herself to the redoubtable Sheriff.

"Come, children, we must run home. There's a fierce Wasco gentleman in the woods and he might get us, for we haven't any protectors," she cried laughing, sure in her heart they were all her protectors.

As she went away down the sunlit trail with three big patrolmen to guard her against outlaws and sheriffs, every man remaining in that camp followed her with his eyes and his heart. Jenks mournfully seized the new dipper and poured himself a big dose of water.

"She's a lady," he announced sentimentally, "and I guess the Sheriff is able to paddle his own canoe." And they drank in turn to the sentiment, partly because it was the new dipper and *she* had drunk from it.

The sun was just blanketed behind the range and the hush of darkness was settling upon the

foothills as Myra entered the stage for the return journey to Hilltown. Several other passengers were aboard, woodmen and one or two women, and the stage halted frequently in the first mile or two to discharge them one after another.

A mile from the great flat stone which marked the trail to Hilltown where Myra and her father had that morning awaited the stage, they entered the deep gloom of a fir forest. The great trunks on either side of the road were scarce visible as the driver cracked his whip over the cantering horses and hastened the speed. Within the coach a solitary oil lamp lighted the face of Myra, and those of the man and his wife who were now her sole companions.

Suddenly, though there was no grade at that spot to account for it, they felt the grinding shock of the brakes. Next moment the driver delivered a solitary "Damn!" uttered beneath his breath, and the coach slowed to a standstill.

The woodman, alarmed, leaped out, as did his wife and Myra, and beheld the driver erect with the reins fallen before him and hands high in air.

All three of the passengers knew on the instant what had occurred. The woodman's hand descended like a flash to his gun.

"Drop it!—Hands up, everybody," came in a curiously sharp whiplike voice from a tall indis-

tinged figure not fifteen feet away; and the grim mouth of a Colt pointed menacingly first at the driver and then at the woodman.

It was all so quietly done, so much like an ordinary stop, that Myra could scarce believe the import of it. There was none of the theatric play she had imagined under the circumstances; everything was so orderly, that she failed to fully appreciate the danger. Not so the woodman, he realized in an instant. There was no money aboard the stage. Everyone knew that. It was the girl Myra that was wanted. With him it was now or never, and quick as thought up came his arm with the weapon in it. Scarce had it moved before there was a report and the man sank to the ground, his revolver dropping away from him, his shoulder pierced by the outlaw's bullet.

His wife stooped instinctively to aid him, and then Myra, still half dazed, realized that stage and horses were disappearing down the road on a wild pell-mell rush, with the driver shouting and making desperate attempts to reach his lost reins.

The light from the coach disappeared and left them in deep gloom. Instinctively she moved to pick up the woodman's revolver and the next moment she felt her wrists in a firm powerful grip. She heard something *click*, and then—horror in-

credible—she was handcuffed. She shrieked in dismay; but a hand roughly stuffed something in her mouth and she was swung from the ground with sudden and irresistible power. Next instant she felt her bosom against the heaving breast of the man and his arms encircling her body; then came a swift upward rush through thick dank woods; she heard a despairing shriek from the woman on the highway. A twig flew into her face, and another. She struggled, but those arms tightened around her, and the pace only quickened.

She felt the man's hot breath against her forehead and in the gloom she saw that his face was masked; and the tightening of the muscles of steel around her waist and her limbs, and the pressure of his powerful chest against her well nigh smothered her.

Presently, however, the pressure relaxed as her bearer placed her upon the ground. She was dimly conscious that the stars beyond the tree-tops were just appearing, and wondered if the sun had yet set on old Mount Ranier, far away to the south.

Once more she knew she was being lifted, that the terrible, remorseless grip was closing around her, tighter than ever. She was going up, up, into the heart of the Olympics, and slowly the awful horror of it all came to her—the present—the

future. She writhed in a final desperate struggle, only to be carried closer and more firmly. She tried to cry out, but only sobbed under the gag in her mouth; then in her pitiful extremity she started to pray silently. But on a sudden the half-seen woodland sky became blurred, a roaring sound churned in her ears, and she mercifully lost consciousness.

A little while later she awakened to the flashing of a light in her eyes. The desperado had laid her on the ground beside a fallen tree, whether in mercy to her or because he was tired she could not tell. Between her thick, dark, half-opened eyelashes, she saw him bend over her with a lighted match, alarm in his face.

"Fainted," he muttered, as he extinguished the light and listened for any sound from behind. There was none. The two were high in the foothills now and far from the road. The danger of detection was indeed remote. He groped in the deep gloom and, lifting her prostrate figure slightly, adjusted it better to its leafy bed. He removed the gag from her mouth, and then discovered that she was conscious.

"Scream if you want to," he said. "It won't be of any use though. Better keep your strength. We've got a long climb yet."

She closed her eyes. His voice was quiet and it carried no threat; there was a peculiar, almost

a melodious drawl to it, and she knew at once from what she had heard that she was in the hands of the dangerous outlaw Hardeman.

What could she do? With despairing presence of mind she decided to appear weaker than she really was; to await her opportunity to escape. The moon, which was now at its full, was beginning to cast its beams through the firs. She could see quite distinctly that they were some way below the entrance of a narrow pass that cut upward and around the highest foothill, leading between two overshadowing granite peaks to the left. He was taking her into the unknown regions; the regions where the Pacific winds whirled past the giants of the range on the way east; the land which had never been visited even by a stray prospector; which was the most inaccessible, the roughest, the most lonesome imaginable.

She thought; and as she thought, once more her mind darkened with fear. When he had her there, when she was all alone with him, what would happen then? And how long would she live to know of it?

It was a great plateau beyond and behind those peaks, known to exist because it could be seen from the nearby summits, but unvisited in the memory of any man in these parts, unless the Indians. She knew the pass led to that mys-

terious region, for she had heard the stately Talabam, chief of the Yakimas, tell of it. 'The Land of the Silent Wind—beyond the pass named the Devil's Walk'—was the Indian's description of it. This frowning pass above her was the 'Devil's Walk.'

Summoning her courage she rolled suddenly away from her captor and leaped to her feet unsteadily; and lifting her handcuffed wrists before her made a motion of offense.

He merely laughed.

"Oh, pshaw, what's the use? I've certainly no intention of harming you. Sit down and be sensible; don't overtax yourself or you'll faint again."

He spoke in that calm soft voice of his and sat down himself, ignoring the menacing handcuffs lifted to strike him. "Couldn't hurt me if you tried," he laughed.

"Take off these—take them off!" she cried angrily and defiantly.

He was silent a moment, as though considering the matter. "I will some day—when you say please. But not now," he said, with an unpleasant smile on his mouth.

"Some day!" She sank to the tree-trunk and buried her face in her hands, the awful horror of her position descending on her heart like lead. She was to be a prisoner for days. This was

only the beginning—the beginning of what? She *must* escape; but *how*?

She might make a rush now, this moment, and succeed in eluding him, but what could she do against the wild dangers of these deep gloomy forests—the bears for instance—she unarmed and bound? Suppose she escaped for a while! Strong and fleet as he was, how long could she expect to elude him?

It was one thing to rush through the forests, over obstructions, down streams and along dangerous paths, when the free use of one's limbs was given; but she was handcuffed. She saw the hopeless folly of any attempt at escape now. No; she must wait.

Evidently he divined her thoughts. “No use, you see! Escape ain't possible. But you'll be well cared for; you needn't have the slightest fear of yours truly,” he said with his intolerable smile.

Was he mocking her? or was he speaking the truth? Could it be that she was safe from bodily harm with him? She had heard many of the stories of his career told openly by the people of Hilltown; others she had heard vaguely. But she was quick to remember those hints of his treatment of women which seemed to lie deep in every narration of his exploits.

“I haven't the slightest fear of you person-

ally," she answered with an assumption of courage. "You are altogether too clever to jeopardize your neck. You couldn't touch me against my will and expect to escape the noose, or—or—you see the patrolmen will come. Every man in the Olympics will—" she almost sobbed in the strength of her confidence in them.

He seized her arm clumsily and thrust his face with evil admiration close to hers.

"You're right; they surely will—but I guess it's goin' to be worth it. Glad you ain't afraid o' me. Say now, but I wouldn't hurt you—not fer all the gold in the State o' Washington. Come," and he half led, half dragged her a step or two forward, angrily resisting.

"I will *not* go," she flashed forth. "Don't you presume to touch me, or to lay a finger on me, sir," and her chin shot up, and she stamped her foot, lovely in her feeble defiance. But she had forgotten that this was no vassal, no presumptuous, good-natured admirer.

The outlaw paused for a moment, regarding her. Then he laughed, and in the coarse brutality of the sound she learned her error.

"You're too confounded sassy, my lady. You'll learn better by and by. Shucks fer your patrolmen. Shucks fer you," and with a swift lunge he caught her fiercely and swept her off the ground, and the next moment she was being borne

along, faint with terror and half strangled, in his muscular embrace as before.

Compared with this, all his past roughness had been the merest gentleness. His square wicked jaw was shut hard; and sinister cruelty was stamped on every line of his lower face, which alone was visible to her.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE SILENT LAND.

A FEW moments more of this journey brought fear to Myra's heart far beyond any she had felt before. Until now the ruffian had been fairly kind. But that was gone. He was transformed. This animal, muttering vile curses between his clenched teeth, whose arms gripped her helpless, though furiously resisting body with the vicious license of unbridled anger, was a mere human beast, obeying his primordial human instinct—conquest of woman. A bear leading his mate to his den on the mountain side was millenniums in advance of him. Myra in her stupor of terror recognized the devil she had roused, and the instinct of the woman in her knew instantly she must do something to placate him. She had taken the wrong way. In her desperate plight it would be better to propitiate him, to appear less belligerent, less horror-stricken at his loathsome passion than she felt.

“You hurt me. Let me down and I'll walk.”

Notwithstanding that her face was deathly white, her voice sounded sweet and womanly in his ears, as she had intended.

He hesitated; then released her, leering upon her his evident willingness to be conciliated. Loosed from his hot, vile grasp she gasped in spite of herself.

“Walk then,” he breathed heavily, “and when you’re tired, mind you say so. Don’t try any damned woman’s conniptions with me. I never stand fer them.”

She was heartily glad to be alive by this time. She thrust back her anger, her terrified, helpless, insulted tears, and walked rapidly by his side, as he half led, half pulled her along, one of his rough hands grasping her securely meanwhile.

They were headed for the pass, though it was still miles away, and the wind from the greatest of oceans was striking them full in the face. Her hair had fallen loose down her back, and her breath was coming in gasps from distress and the violent exercise. Such sheer terror was upon her that she could not think connectedly. Her mind was benumbed, yet fearfully alive—alive to the end of this journey.

Full night had come, but the outlaw made no change in his furious haste. It was a strange country to Myra. Nature here was stern and gloomy; fearful blackness lurked between the

scattered ghostly pines; and great boulders and dim ragged knolls loomed forbiddingly under the faint sky. Every rock and stone, every clump of sentinel trees, seemed in league with the evil of the place, and to deny her unuttered appeals for aid.

But nature had produced no coward when she made Myra.

Gradually her mind cleared, and she perceived that his intent to take her where distance meant safety to himself, meant also respite to her—temporary at least—even with certain doom at the end; and though she knew the men of the patrol would soon be out on the trail, hot and vengeful, knew too that they could never hope to overtake her in time—she did not falter. Her only hope lay in herself.

She dared not think now of father or friends. All her thoughts were centered on this stalwart ruffian whose grasp painfully crushed her wrist, and dragged her, breathless and stumbling, beside him. How could she circumvent him?

She must rally her woman's resources; she must keep him off, must conciliate him until some opportunity for freedom offered. If she could not do this—if she could not fight with woman's wit—if she could not find his weaker side, she was lost. Her lot would be worse than that of a captive slave in the days of Roman Con-

quest. Young and innocent of the darker side of life, she knew the stories of history. She knew by instinct of her sex that she was face to face with the raw devil still lurking in man behind the veneer of centuries of civilization.

So summoning her courage she spoke to him again, striving to hide her fear, and begged him softly not to hurt her, and thanked him half whispering when he lessened his pull on her wrists. Spent and panting, she dared not hang back lest he should again attempt to carry her. He was tireless. He had the strength of a grizzly bear.

At last when it seemed that her heart must burst with exertion, she stumbled and fell heavily on a loose stone. Some feeling of pity stirred him perhaps, as he raised her, and perceived her exhausted state. With a queer, unexpected gentleness he seated her of his own accord on a boulder.

"Played out, and too doggoned proud to say so, ain't you? Here, rest, and remember I ain't goin' to kill you."

He seemed no longer angry. The line of his mouth while harsh and grim had softened from its late look of cruelty. His voice was almost kind. From the moment she had tried timidly to thank him for relaxing his grasp of her aching wrists his manner had changed and grown grad-

ually softer and less peremptory. It almost seemed that the normal feeling of civilized man—to protect and help the woman—had risen in him and was swaying his actions toward her.

“Where are we going? Where are you taking me? I’ve done you no harm,” she cried to him beseechingly. Her voice shook in spite of her bravery; the thrill of fear and lonesomeness was in it.

He answered in a melodious drawl, half mocking yet not unkind, which might have been attractive in any other man:

“We’re going where no white man but me has trodden before—the land of the Silent Wind. Ever hear of that place? To-morrow we’ll be through the pass. You’ll be Queen of the country, and I—well, I’ll be your Prince Charming and dance to your bidding.”

She was braver than she ever thought she could be under such circumstances. Much as she had heard of the personality of this great outlaw, she was unprepared for such a change in him; so, gathering her courage again, she answered:

“Suppose that I don’t want you to dance my bidding? Supposing I’d very much prefer to remain alone?”

“Then you shall. But to be alone will be worse than to be in my company. There are

things worse than being queen to a solitary subject, even an outlaw. And one of those things is to be a queen alone in the place we're going to, which is really, Miss Thorn, the land where even the wind makes no noise. It is a great region of silence. And silence is devilish lonesome."

She shuddered, but offered no further resistance; and again he led her forward toward the fateful pass. The journey was long, and broken often by minutes when he insisted upon her resting. He brought her water and gave her bread from his pockets, even apologizing for the poor quality of the food. And so at last the dawn broke upon them.

Early evening of that day had come ere they reached the top of the pass. Then they looked down upon a land of huge trees and many boulders, and mile upon mile of high plain, dotted here and there with sudden abrupt risings in the form of small, flat-topped hills with precipitous sides—like the mesas of the far South.

She must have fainted from sheer exhaustion, or fallen asleep at last; for she knew nothing more until she found herself lying upon a great bear-skin at the mouth of a cave. She glanced around and knew that she was on one of the flat-topped elevations, for she could see the plain a hundred feet below, the wooded land in the distance, with the Olympics towering behind, the

sun of another day just topping their crests. Afar off to the west she perceived a great body of water. The breeze that caused no sound on the barren plain below came salt-laden from the Pacific. She arose weakly, and an intense relief seized her as she did so—for there at her feet were the handcuffs. She was alone on the mesa, and the terrors past were momentarily lost in the joy of being limb free, of once more being her own physical self.

Food and water had been placed at the mouth of the cave. She was nearly famished; and so, gathering hope from this kindness, and still more from the outlaw's absence, she ate the food and set about exploring her environments.

It was indeed a lonely locality. Surrounding the cave were a number of boulders rearing their flat heads high in air, but on this mesa there was nothing else. Not only was she alone there, but she could not fail to notice the great stillness of the whole surrounding land.

At first it was no hardship. To be alone, freed from her captor's presence, was relief. She quickly discovered that the plains below could be reached only by a perilous descent on the mesa's southern side. Up this side she had been borne. Stooping over, she could discern heavy footprints in the treacherous earth. For a woman to escape that way would be a most diffi-

cult undertaking; but nevertheless she studied it carefully, for she might need to take a desperate chance before long.

The day seemed never to end. The cloudless sky and the utter loneliness palled upon her. Her mental distress grew acute. At times her thoughts came feverishly fast; at other times she had no thoughts whatever, but wandered aimlessly about, scarcely conscious of what she was doing. Towards sunset she missed the sounds of animal life she was used to, the cheerful chirping of birds, the mooing of kine, so dear to her over the range in Hilltown. She became acutely pained by the noise of her own footsteps; the rustle of her skirts seemed weird and without cause. She spoke aloud in her distress, but her voice came back to her in a low, mocking echo from around the huge boulders. The sun dipping beneath the Pacific flared against the Olympics and dazzled her sight as she looked towards the far distant pass, hoping vainly that she might see human forms descending to her aid. Surely Captain Butts and his men were already on her trail! She paused to think. Surely they were searching for her, but—would they ever think of this place? Why should they? None of them knew it save in a legendary way. No, they would look much nearer home. There was no hope from them.

She was now crying softly to herself. Her head was on fire. She could hear no sound, from below or above, and the stars just beginning to appear seemed real beings, unfriendly and silent as all else, twinkling only to annoy and terrify her. All overpowered she fell sobbing to the earth by the cave's mouth.

"Lost," she murmured, "lost to the world, and to father—to father." Then a wild outburst of grief came to her relief.

She lay there a long time, waiting and listening. She was waiting for the return of her jailer. If this was part of his plan to reduce her will, it was as successful as it was cruel. She could have killed him for it, only that would have left her destitute of the hope of even his treacherous society. For it *was* a hope now, as well as a dread.

"Better him—better that man than to be alone," she whispered. Then in a flash of bitter memory she recalled the tales she had heard of his deadly enemy, the Sheriff of Wasco.

She laughed aloud in utter scorn. "The Sheriff of Wasco. Some farmer with a reputation for picking a fight. He on the trail of Hardeman! With such a prodigy round how was the stage held up so easily? How was I captured without interference? *The Sheriff of Wasco!* Bah—he's a myth."

At this moment she became conscious of a movement at the edge of the mesa. Her heart leapt to her throat as a figure crawled over its edge—revolver in hand.

She was on her feet, queenly despite her tattered clothing and disheveled hair, her eyes shining hard and bright.

“So you’ve come back. Well—” and her voice shook queerly, “I’m glad to see you.”

“Thought you likely would be,” he retorted, and slipping his revolver into place looked at her; then he laughed at her with open brutality. “Lonesomeness cured you, didn’t it? What did I tell you? You’re goin’ to grow real fond o’ me by an’ by.”

Myra never winced. She was fighting him now with the only weapons she had.

“Do not make me fear you,” she said with gentle appeal. “Yes, it was lonesome. Where have you been all day?”

He liked to be appealed to. “Well, well, I’ve been sorter prospectin’,” he said tolerantly, with a fierce after chuckle at his own humor.

“Prospecting? For what? Gold?”

He laughed again. “Ever hear of anybody prospectin’ for coyotes? That’s what I went after.”

She did not understand anything beyond the half indulgent mockery of his voice.

"Coyotes? They aren't common round here, Mr. Hardeman," she persisted.

"The ones that consider their health ain't," he agreed. Smiling grimly he reached back for the heavy Colt at his side, and laid it shimmering on the moonlit ground. "There's one particular coyote calls himself a Sheriff, who's been layin' on my trail so long now its gettin' tiresome. First good sight I have of him, Miss Thorn, he gets *this*."

Myra's heart had given a great leap, but the outlaw never guessed.

"Poor man," she said lightly. "Sheriffs are usually good shots, though. Suppose he happens to see you first?"

Hardeman picked up his weapon and restored it to its place before meeting her smiling, indifferent glance. "In that case I'm afraid you'll find this a very lonely mesa," he returned mockingly.

Her hopes dropped again despairingly, but outwardly she only shrugged her shoulders at him. "Horrors. Kill twenty sheriffs rather than that. Your mesa is not a nice place, and I'm afraid they'd never find me."

His bold admiration of her increased as he watched her, his eyes flashing through the black cloth which still hid his upper face. He liked courage; and this graceful moonlit statue beside

the boulder, which was his by the law of might to use as he pleased, had it.

"Say, I like you better and better every minute," was the unexpected answer, delivered with unwelcome ardor. "Don't you worry about the Sheriff. He ain't goin' to leave you lonesome on this mesa. Not much. In just about two days from now there won't be any Sheriff of Wasco."

Swaggering, he crossed in two strides the space between them and laid his hand on her arm.

"I haven't had any dinner. Aren't you forgetting?" said Myra desperately?

"Why, thunder—so I was," he laughed gruffly, recovering himself. "Well, there's plenty of time. We'll have supper and make love afterwards—eh?"

Hospitably he scurried around and built a fire on the farther side of one of the great boulders, roasted some meat and carved it for her with his hunting knife, all the time making merry over the hotel service on the mesa.

"Got to keep our light from being seen from the pass," he explained frankly. "Some of your friends might be there an' want to investigate."

Myra's heart gave such a leap that it almost smothered her, but she took her courage in both hands and said quietly:

"And if they should of course you'd lose your

ransom." She smiled daringly, half understandingly at him. "How much are you going to ask for me? Poor father, he'd pay anything, I guess."

For a second or two he gazed at her incredulously. Then, grasping her arm, he bent forward and stared with his smouldering wicked eyes deep down into hers, his face twitching beneath his mask. "Ransom," he said in a growling laugh, as he kicked out the embers of the dying fire, "*Ransom—Hell!*"

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGER.

THE news of the abduction travelled with celerity to Hilltown. As the stage dashed by the foot of the hill the driver raised the alarm in a voice that carried to the settlement above, and men came pouring down to the road to join in the chase after the runaway.

Cutting through the forest, they headed the animals at a distant turn and stopped them without difficulty; and then the facts quickly became public property.

The woman and her injured husband were soon found, and willing hands carried the wounded man to the settlement, while a body of woodmen started after the highwayman in the direction in which he had disappeared with his captive.

Messengers were dispatched to inform the patrol. When Butts heard the news and delivered it to his men there was tremendous activity for a few minutes. Revolvers were loaded and dropped in position at each man's side, and carbines

rattled as their owners looked to their magazines to be sure that everything was in exact working order.

Shots were fired and red light burned to summon the members of the day shift who had not yet returned to camp. The fire signals cast a deep red hue against the Olympics, flaring high in the sky and visible for miles around, while the shots reverberated through the foothills with sharp staccato voices.

In answer to the emergency signals never before used, and dreaded by all the men, they came running from far and near. Instinctively they felt that it was something to do with the outlaw of whom so much had been said recently. When they found that Myra Thorn had been taken away, deep curses and cries for vengeance came from their throats, and they joined the others with vindictive alacrity, although they were already well tired out by the day's work.

A few hurried explanations and commands from Butts, and the men were away for the long chase. A couple of patrolmen and the two Chinamen were left behind. The Orientals were anxious to stay, they freely confessed it, for they were scared brown by the knowledge of what had happened.

The two other men, however, swore oaths that were long and choice when Butts ordered them

to remain behind and guard the cabin. Their wrath and indignation was finally appeased by the promise that theirs would be the honor of stringing up the outlaw whom the posse confidently expected to lead back into camp.

Butts himself headed the main body of men. Red-faced with excitement, his veins stood out on his neck like whip cords. Jones headed another party. The two divisions subdivided into groups of three or four as they approached the scene of the abduction, after a long and wearying run that lasted until late into the night. Then a semi-circle was formed that covered a large area, and began to advance towards the mountains above, for they all believed that some of the deep gorges or great hidden caves would be found to be the outlaw's lair.

Every man had orders to capture him alive if possible; to save the girl at all hazards. Every man was aware that he himself would be shot by Hardeman on sight; but they all were taking desperate chances. They searched everywhere, using lanterns when the moon failed to aid them. Not one of the patrol thought of self; each man thought of the outlaw, and first and above everything of the girl.

The woodmen from Hilltown had formed other parties and were thoroughly scouring the country. But all attempts to discover the out-

law's whereabouts were destined to disappointment.

Morning came and no trace of him. The search continued until every possible hiding-place had been sought out and examined—that is every such place east or north of the mountains. The outlaw had vanished completely. The long start he had obtained had made his escape certain. Nobody had thought of a possible flight through the pass, into the Land of the Silent Winds, for the pass had never been crossed to their knowledge, and it existed in men's minds more as a legendary locality than as an actual place.

Thus it was that the day advanced into afternoon and still the searchers were baffled. The opinion was now firm that Hardeman had doubled on his tracks and carried his captive away by water, perhaps south, perhaps north to the Canadian frontier.

During the afternoon the two patrolmen who had been left behind at the cabin headquarters were seated outside the door, watching the Chinamen as they collected the logs for the camp fire. They were also discussing the progress of the search, for word had come to them but a short time before from Hilltown.

Bill Thomas, the older of the two men had

turned to his comrade and remarked: "Dutch, it strikes me as how they're wastin' their time."

"Sure! That there outlaw's doubled and taken the girl across Juan de Fuca."

There was a dissatisfied grunt from Thomas, who continued to chew his tobacco slowly and ponderously. Evidently Dutch had not quite chimed with his way of thinking. The younger man waited for an explanation, but not getting any slowly enquired:

"What is the matter with you, anyway?"

"Darn fools talking about Juan de Fuca, is what's the matter with me."

Dutch was on his feet in an instant. "What in the name of thunder ails Juan de Fuca?"

Thomas got up too, "Don't you know the straits was rougher than blazes last night? Who in the name of a skunk cabbage could row a girl away in such a seaway? Could you, you doggone idiot?"

"Bill Thomas, you're the conceitedest ass this side the range—but you're right fer once."

Both men were galled and sick and sore at having been left behind, and a fight had been narrowly averted by Dutch's timely diplomacy. Thomas was deeply disgusted and spitting out his tobacco remarked:

"San Juan de Fuca be blowed. You're too young to have sense enough to grow old."

“ Well acknowledging I’m wrong, Mr. Thomas, what is your overcrowded headpiece evolving? What kind of a theory are you about to spit out? ”

“ The Devil’s Pass.”

“ The Walk? ”

“ Sure, you lightweight. Hardeman’s fooled ’em all. He’s cut through to t’other side o’ the mountains.

“ Can’t be, Bill. Nobody’s ever cut through the pass.”

“ That’s no sign nobody can’t get through. I’ll bet you Hardeman’s taken the girl to the place you and I seen once from the top of old Brown Face.” He indicated a giant peak in the distance as he spoke. Dutch pondered a moment and exclaimed in awe:

“ The Land o’ Silence! Where Chief Talabam said the dead Indians was moving around as though they was alive, but didn’t make no noise.”

“ Bosh! you know that’s a story, Dutch. The land is all right, only it ain’t been explored.”

“ When Butts comes back we’ll see what he don’t know about chasing outlaws—eh, Bill? ”

“ We will, Dutch; ” assented Bill confidentially “ and we’ll get on the trail ourselves, and visit the unknown country and catch Hardeman sure.”

Both men were good-natured again. They had a scheme that promised results.

"I'll shoot that Hardeman on sight," remarked Dutch slowly to himself.

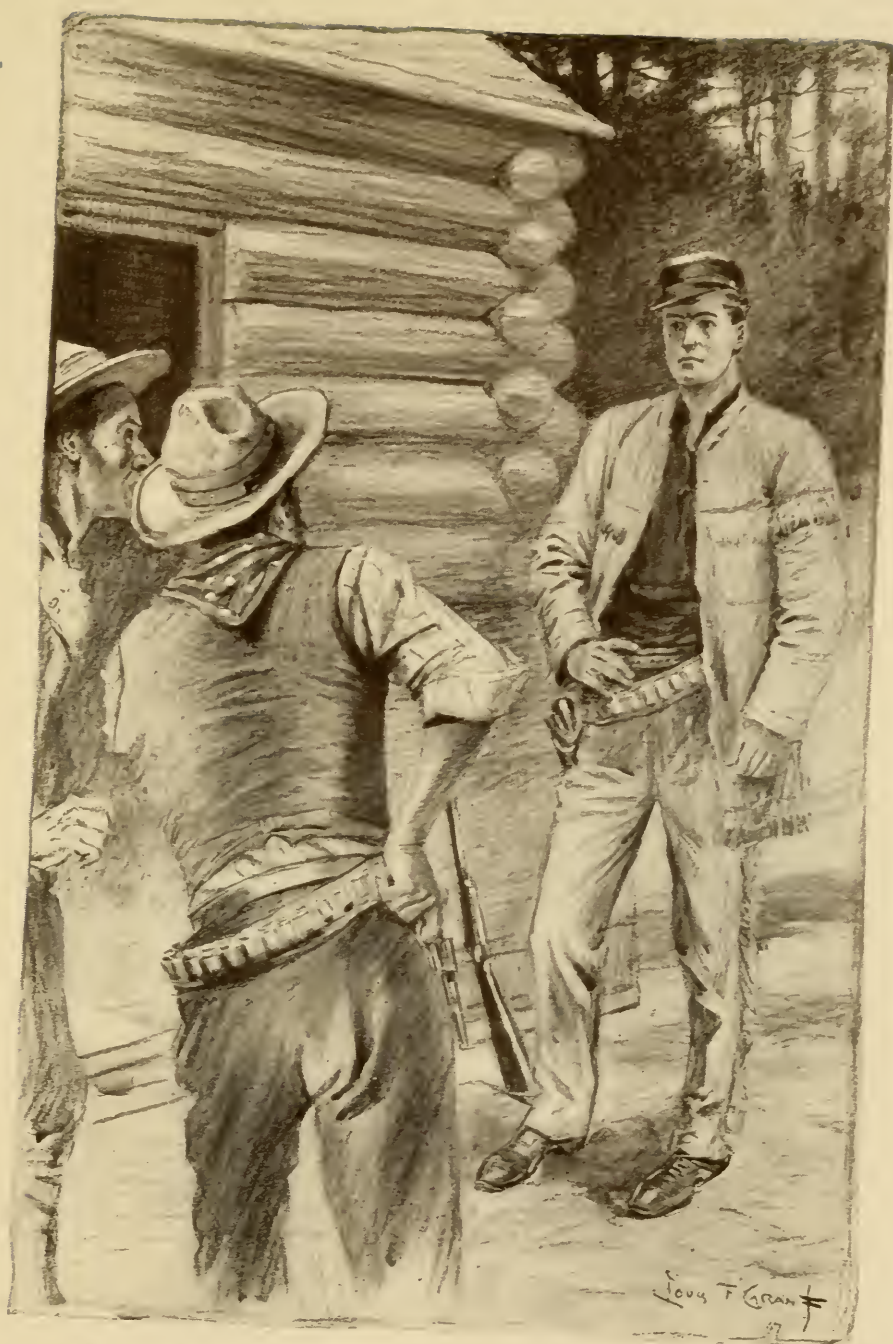
"I'll bore the cuss from four hundred yards; my carbine's a dandy," boasted Thomas.

"*So are you a dandy.*" The words came laughingly, sarcastically, teasingly, from just behind the patrolmen.

Thomas and Dutch wheeled with one accord and faced the speaker.

With one arm he was nonchalantly supporting himself against the edge of the cabin. His face was tanned and quite youthful; he was not much over thirty, and his blue eyes beamed alertly under his well-formed brows. His lower face was strong and well shaped, and his mouth wore a sarcastic twist. He was clean-shaven and dressed above in a blue flannel shirt and a well worn buckskin coat, which was flung back on the right side, so that his hand rested on his belt, quite near to the handle of a heavy revolver. Bill and Dutch also noticed that a repeating rifle was resting lazily against the log wall of the cabin.

The unknown's trousers were like his coat, buckskin, and well worn. His chest was broad, and showed a little beneath his shirt. On his head was an old visored cap, cocked saucily



"So are *you* a dandy."

backwards, exposing a heavy head of hair and a bold forehead.

He was unusually tall and well built; and was evidently enjoying the patrolmen's surprise, for he chuckled quite audibly as their glances met his.

Noticing his coat, Bill blurted out:

"Stranger to these regions?"

The new arrival bowed in mock seriousness. "Correct! I inadvertently overheard your remarks about Hardeman, and how you two were going to make a sieve of him; so I decided to apologize for my apparent impoliteness and get on friendly terms with such dangerous men as you."

Yang Foo and Yang Ko were now edging towards the kitchen door. This stranger might be all right, but he had a peculiar expression, and they decided that caution was wise in Orientals.

The Chinamen had both seen gun play. The calmness of courage or deviltry that precedes the instantaneous movement of the hand downward, the sudden jerking of the arm and the well-nigh simultaneous report, all were old acquaintances to them; and they liked not the easy, indifferent poise of this stranger.

They vanished into the kitchen, slamming the door after them; and then went out of the back window and streaked for the woods and Hill-

town, to tell of the camp's horrible visit from the outlaw.

Thomas and Dutch made no hostile movement; they knew better. The stranger was master of the situation.

"Glad to see you, stranger," remarked Bill, "Make yourself at home."

The visitor grinned: "Are you really glad to see me, boys;—really?"

The voice was quiet and euphonious, and Dutch remarked in an undertone.

"That's him—and he's laughing at us. It's the outlaw."

"Sure," muttered Bill, as he uneasily shifted his position and motioned to the stranger to sit down.

"Yes; glad to see you o' course. Awful lonesome since the patrol got after that Hardeman."

The stranger was nearly laughing aloud. "You two fellows go and join the hunt; I'll watch camp for you. You ought to have a chance to plug him from four hundred yards with that dandy carbine of yours. And your friend ought to be allowed to kill him on sight."

Dutch sat down; and the stranger, seizing his rifle, moved quickly to a stone nearby and perched upon it.

"You two fellows never met Hardeman, did you?" he queried.

"Nope."

"Well, he's harmless. He's a gentle, misjudged creature with the world against him."

The patrolmen were getting decidedly uneasy. The visitor was certainly enjoying himself at their expense. His voice and his general appearance as well as his manner stamped him the *out-law*.

They felt that they were in the presence of the notorious Hardeman, and he was up to some of his famous tricks. He was too gentlemanly, too oily, for comfort.

The new arrival made a sudden move with his left hand into his coat pocket and pulled out a cigar case. Then, watching the two meanwhile as a cat watches a mouse, he extended it. Each patrolman took a cigar, the first in months, and all three started to smoke while the stranger began to ask questions regarding the Devil's Walk and the locality beyond.

Bill exchanged glances with Dutch, and they mentally decided to tell all that they knew, and to tell it quickly.

"The searchers haven't gone to the pass?" queried the visitor finally.

"No," answered Thomas laconically.

"Will you lead them there tonight?"

"No," and Bill shook his head earnestly.

"If you don't, you can't use your little car-

bine. He'll get away." The visitor chuckled again, and rising to go, stepped backward, smiling curiously.

Somehow he tripped, but caught himself before falling; and as he did so he saw that Thomas had profited by the opportunity. The patrolman's hand was already on his gun, and Dutch was launching himself forward with a swinging blow.

Quick as a flash, the stranger brought his fist to Bill's neck, and the guardsman went down like a lumbering ox. Then he turned and closed with the agile Dutch. In a moment the younger patrolman went spinning backwards under the impact of a fearful blow. The visitor stooped over his prostrate victims and disarmed them. He waited until each staggered dizzily to his feet, then he tossed their weapons disdainfully into a gully nearby.

"There, you clumsy fools, hunt for them. You couldn't catch Hardeman if you had him in a barrel."

He bowed in mock solemnity, and with eyes twinkling and lips curling in sarcastic enjoyment disappeared into the forest.

"Why didn't you plug him?" yelled Dutch to the older man. "You had a chance."

"I didn't get no chance. He saw me hand

reach for me gun and then he come like a whirlwind. Why the—didn't you shoot him instead of trying to use yer fists."

Dutch hunched his shoulders. "Let's look for our guns," he exclaimed meekly, and the two shamefacedly dropped into the gully and began a hunt for their sidearms.

The frightened Chinamen had given the alarm to several woodmen and these rushed to the camp.

They found Bill and Dutch in the gully and the two patrolmen were obliged to tell what had happened. To make their own position less embarrassing they gave a highly exaggerated and lurid description of the terrible fight, of the outlaw's agility, and of their having been overpowered by superhuman strength. As both patrolmen were strong, active men, the others readily agreed that Hardeman must be every bit as bad as he had been painted.

"He was just a-kidding us all the while," explained Bill apologetically, "laughing at us."

"He can lick the whole doggoned patrol," asserted Dutch, "an' he don't need no guns neither."

Dismay seized the searchers when the report spread that the outlaw had visited the camp and braved capture. Everyone thought of the girl.

He must have secreted her somewhere meanwhile.

Redoubled efforts were made to find her; but early next morning, the second after her disappearance the patrol began straggling back to camp, exhausted and despondent. The outlaw's visit became an engrossing subject of conversation immediately.

"Yes," said Thomas to Butts' query, "he heard us two talk about how Hardeman might 'a took Miss Thorn through the pass to the Silent Land over yonder. Then he steps up and appears mightily interested; wanted to know if I'd lead you there."

"He did, did he? He just wanted to lie in wait for us and pick us off one by one. The cuss has got Miss Thorn across the mountains, sure."

"Mighty funny he came back, though," suggested Jenks, the patrolman from Oregon. "He oughter been busy getting away."

There was silence around the fire. The men were at a loss to understand the action of the outlaw. The driver of the stage, who had been brought to camp, sat with his face in his hands, gazing hopelessly at the fire.

Suddenly Jenks turned to Thomas and inquired:

"How was he dressed? How did he look?"

"Ordinary buckskin trousers and coat and a

visor cap. He's as graceful and quick as a cat, an' he's a young cuss; ain't over thirty-three. He talks educated."

The driver sat up and gazing thoughtfully before him said: "He hadn't no buckskin coat, and no visor cap when he held me up. He certainly hadn't no visor cap."

Jenks was on his feet in an instant. "*A visor cap?* Bill—Dutch—You smoked cigars with a gentleman, I tell you."

"What the dickens?" growled Bill.

"That's the Sheriff o' Wasco!"

There was a roar of surprise and doubt as the men stood up and surrounded the speaker, who continued enthusiastically: "Yes, it was that Sheriff sure. He's young and he's full o' the devil. He's over the pass after Hardeman by this time. He wanted to know if you were coming, did he? All he wanted to know was if he could have the game to himself."

"He's a cuss," yelled Dutch. "He's a regiment from Hell let loose."

Unable to control his excitement he thumped his friend on the back, and the two, who were glad to know they had been licked by a gentleman, bellowed in unison.

"He's a slick one, he is. He's a son of a gun."

The others caught their enthusiasm, and a

mighty cheer rose through the hills like the roaring of wild animals. There was hope for the girl. The daring fellow from Wasco was close on the trail.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NIGHT ON THE MESA.

THE chill that struck Myra, alone with her captor, was not without ample cause.

The determination and wickedness in his voice sounded like the clanging of the door of hope. The dying embers fled apart under his heavy feet like live things upon which he was wreaking vengeance. Desperately she glanced behind her at the cave. If there were only a weapon—a knife, a stick—anything with which to defend herself. But there was nothing.

Almost instantly he strode back beside her, on his lips an evil yet tolerant smile.

“Look-a-here now, you want to keep on the right side of me, and not get me mad talkin’ about ransom and such doggoned foolery. I ain’t always apt to be a gentleman when I’m mad.”

Myra looked at him with white lips. “You get angry with me too easily, Mr. Hardeman. I am not used to it, you know. If you want me to like you, you must be patient with me.”

“Eh?” he thrust his hand under her chin and

raised her twitching face.--“Like me! You bet I want you to like me. I wouldn’t take a million dollars for you, I think so much of you. I’m dead in love with you—see? been in love with you for a—for some time; so I’ve brought you off here where I won’t be disturbed in my love-making. Ain’t any of your friends likely to eavesdrop on us here—eh? Now you be nice and reasonable, and you’ll find Mr. Hardeman a gentleman, and more.”

“You planned all this—you made your preparations beforehand?” the question fluttered from Myra’s lips.

“Sure, I did, and I *got* you. I always put a deal through when I begin it,” he answered with a boastful grin.

Blighted by his sneers, by the sense of her utter helplessness, she stood trembling. He was a tiger—worse, oh far worse than a tiger. But there was only one thing for her to do.

Taking a swift step forward—fear and hatred of him in her heart, but on her lips a smile such as she would have given a lover—she laid her hand with almost a caress on his arm, and smiled up at him.

“Mr. Hardeman, do not judge me harshly tonight,” she said softly and beseechingly. “Perhaps I was unfair. I had no—no idea you had ever seen me before. But I am so tired; I am

stupid from lack of sleep and that long journey. You are strong. I have never seen a man as strong as you. Be gentle to me. Show me a place where I can sleep, safe and sound to-night—and tomorrow you will see,” she stopped, catching her breath in a quick little laugh—“oh you will see to-morrow how nice I will be.”

In his delight he caught at her with both hands, but she swiftly eluded him, laughing. He followed her, his drawling, insolent voice quickened by eagerness.

“Now you’re talkin’. That’s the way I like a woman to treat me.” By a dexterous movement he caught her wrist and held her fast. “Damned if I *ain’t* in love with you,” he laughed thickly, “and damned if I don’t make you love me back. I said you were the queen. Supposin’ I agree to this scheme of yours to-night what do I get for it?”

“Let me go first,” said Myra, “I’ll tell you;” and he released her.

“You said you were the Prince Charming! You may kiss my hand—if you promise,” and she extended the member, holding herself off regally but graciously.

Seeing nothing but coquetry in her act and air, he laughed, and with a show of high-flown gallantry took his payment. Then, his honor

being altogether too delicate to bear the strain she was putting on it, he snatched at her as an animal might, and kissed her violently on the mouth, once—and then he added some words. She could not choose but hear, and her cheeks flamed and her ears seemed to wither with ignominy as she fled from him.

Later she lay extended on the bear-skin, alone in the cave which, with boasted chivalry, he had abandoned to her use for the night, and shuddering looked back on that foul precipice from which she had escaped.

She had no tears. Wide-eyed and full of horror she lay staring at the cave's entrance and counted mechanically the stars that showed themselves in the space. An occasional tremor shook her body from head to feet, but without her knowledge. Sometimes she raised her hand and wiped her mouth, but the act was more than half involuntary. She was scarcely conscious of anything in the shock of fear and loathing his words had caused, except that to-morrow—to-morrow—she would be able to fight him off no longer. *To-morrow* he, the beast whom she had hoped in her ignorance and folly to control, would enslave her to his pleasure as doubtless he had enslaved countless women before her.

There was no hope. She had said 'to-morrow' only in the impulse of her fear—in the desire to

delay him, and gain a little respite for herself. He knew there was no hope; else he would have laughed, and destroyed her.

Miles away from the den in which she lay watching, a dim blue mighty wall reached to heaven and bounded off the night. That was the Olympics—her own Olympics—and beyond them her father and friends, frantic with grief, were searching for her. If they but knew, could they but guess what she was suffering—how they would fly to her. Well was it for this dog of an outlaw that he had chosen his lair so wisely.

She did not think of them much, however. They belonged to the past. They were a part of something that was gone. She was now no longer herself—Myra Thorn—but a woman reduced to first principles, a hunted, helpless animal to whom all life and sense were bound up in the coming of to-morrow and the hunter.

As hour after hour went by, and still the same white moonlight and utter silence, she began to wonder whether he had gone away. She had put no faith in his promise that he would leave her in peace even for that night. Yet he made no sound or sign. Perhaps even he had honor of a kind; she had heard that a queer brand of it was said to flourish among thieves. The moon was behind the cave, so that the shadows of the great boulders at the entrance lay slanting along

the grass, always in view; and she knew nothing could move behind her but the shadow of it would be thus projected and give her warning.

Her eyelids were growing fearfully heavy. Even her terrible vigil could not resist the peace and utter quietude that reigned.

She began to find herself keeping watch in dreams which were still more menacing than reality. Starting from one of these lapses some time when the moon was sinking she saw with terror an abnormally long shadow of a man stalking silently across in her direction.

She was on her feet when he appeared. It was Hardeman, but not in a particularly ferocious mood. He was preoccupied, and seemed merely to take casual note that she had not escaped, as he stopped and looked in upon her. He had not come altogether on her account, for while he spoke to her he was looking off in another direction.

"Thought you were asleep?" he asked shortly.

"I was until just a moment ago," said Myra.

Glancing at her fear-stricken mien he gave a sarcastic grunt of a laugh, "Seein' my shadow you thought I'd lied to you, an' was comin' payin' my addresses ahead of time. Lie down and go to sleep. Hardeman's word is as good as the President's, understand. I'm goin' prospectin' again for a while before breakfast. Bring you

something to eat, maybe. When I get back we'll talk."

However he did not set off immediately on his prospecting, but stood for several minutes where he was, backed by one of the boulders, looking across the moonlit country towards the Olympics. Gazing with all her might Myra could detect no sign of life or movement, though his uneasiness called up the wildest hopes.

"What is it—what do you see out there, Mr. Hardeman?" she asked as serenely as she could.

"Guess it's a lone babe in the woods," he answered grimly, without turning his head. "He's lookin' for the way home, and I'm going down to show him. You go to sleep again, or you'll get hurt," he commanded roughly.

In a few seconds he vanished over the edge.

Had she been less wildly excited she might have felt a momentary admiration. He had not hurt her yet, but that was not weakness; only a mere marvelous whim of his. He had no weaknesses. Strong and swift, he was like a big male tiger, sniffing some unknown danger afar off, and stalking savagely forth to meet it.

Left alone she might have slept now in safety; but hope had killed that effectually. Gaze as she might, however, she saw nothing, heard nothing, except the ghostly desolate scenery, lying as it had lain all night. She dared not let hope carry

her away. If rescue were coming, would there be no sound of any kind? Her friends would not sneak upon Hardeman like thieves in the night. There was no voice, no light, no sound of a footstep anywhere. She could not remain any longer in the cave. When the moon sank, she came out and wandered cautiously about in the blackness, listening intently.

At last, just before dawn, she heard a faint shot, leagues away, it seemed. No other sound followed, and after waiting a while she retreated to the shelter of the boulders and stood there trembling. What did that shot portend? Was it her friend, or Hardeman, who had fallen? For there was no doubt now that some friend—it might be the Sheriff of Wasco himself—had discovered the trail and, single-handed perhaps, attempted a rescue.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DOUBTFUL IDENTITY.

THE darkness gradually paled before the dawn, and objects around grew faintly visible as she remained there waiting, half benumbed with anxiety. At last, though she had seen no one approach, the rustle of footsteps passed around the boulder, and looking up she saw, or thought she saw, instead of a friend, only the figure she feared and hated.

He had lost the mask apparently, so she saw his face for the first time, and perceived with a shock how shrewd and clear and pleasant it was. Not the face she would ever have associated with a bad man. But his look of triumph was unmistakable. Plainly he expected her to welcome him back from his deed of blood.

She shrank in an agony of fear.

“ You—you—have you—killed him? ”

His face instantly fell, first to amazement, then to doggedness.

“ No, I ain’t!—Sorry to say it. But he won’t intrude on you any more, not for the present, I guess.—Thought you wanted him killed.”

He was highly offended at her reception of him after his proved valor—in chasing off the Sheriff of Wasco presumably. Poor Myra had learned by past experience not to provoke his anger.

“Oh, I hate killing people—sheriffs or no sheriffs,” she explained piteously, “I heard the shot, and I didn’t know— It’s been terrible waiting up here.” She strove to smile.

Every expression of which a man’s face is capable flashed across his in the space of one second, to be displaced by a look of pity and pleasant tenderness.

“You’re all tuckered out. It has been tough on you, hasn’t it?” he remarked solicitously. Then he smiled quickly. “Oh say—you an’ I oughter be real good friends now, hadn’t we?” Taking a step toward her he had almost laid his hand on her shoulder, but in her horror at the man and his deeds, she shrieked and fled backward precipitately.

“Oh no—don’t; don’t, please! I mean—” she stopped, seeing he did not pursue—“don’t be angry. I’m—I’m nervous, you know, that’s all,” she smiled conciliatingly. “It’s been so dreadful since you went.”

He did not wax brutal. Perhaps the defeat of his chief enemy had put him in better temper. He merely gave her a short but comprehensive

look; then he pulled off his visored cap with a sweep and retreated around the boulder, remarking:

“As you like ma’am, *exactly!*”

Palpitating with relief and dread she heard him set quietly about making a fire.

Myra’s thoughts whirled about with bewildering rapidity for the next fifteen minutes, during which she enjoyed a quite royal privacy. The only intrusion on it indeed was his rifle, which he had left carelessly propped against the rock. Myra ceased questioning, and pounced upon it joyfully. He had carried no such weapon this morning. Undoubtedly it had belonged to that poor unfortunate Sheriff of Wasco, who had been trying to save her.

The next insult Hardeman offered her, he should pay for with his life, provided that gun was loaded. And in an instant she had satisfied herself that it was.

In fifteen minutes she found him again confronting her with a tin cup full of water, in which he signified that she was to wash.

“Thought you might like to get some of this mesa off of you. Breakfast is ready,” he remarked.

Apparently he expected to hold the cup and empty it over her hands. But she willed other-

wise. She wanted privacy while she arranged her thoughts of him.

What amazing change had passed on him since the night? His attitude had altered somehow, oh, so beneficently. He actually obeyed her—as other men did. He was no more that growling, surly ruffian of last night and this morning than—well, than he was the Sheriff of Wasco himself. As he was now she could control him, she was certain. Full of hope, she sallied around the boulder to breakfast, determined to be dignified and gracious, and began at once.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Hardeman, for the water. It certainly was a treat. Where did you get it?”

It took him an extraordinary length of time to answer such a simple question.

“Just down there,” he said indefinitely at last. “I’ll get you some more any time you say so, ma’am.”

Myra pinched herself surreptitiously to preclude any danger that she was dreaming. This was too beautiful for real life.

“I’ve never seen you really till this morning,” she pursued. “You seem—do you know, you seem to be almost another man? Don’t wear that mask again, will you please?—” she added with a touch of entreaty.

There was a long pause. He had ceased even

to eat, and was regarding her with a straight, disconcerting stare which at first she took for anger, till she caught a certain shrewd, keen, and humorous gleam, instantly suppressed.

"No ma'am, I certainly won't," he said with decision. Sticking his knife in the earth while he waited on her he went on quickly:

"You think I'm another man? Well now, I am. I've been thinking a whole lot, and I'm going to ask your pardon if I've scared you and treated you bad. Guess you've been having rather a hard time of it, and to make up I'm going to take you right back home after breakfast." He paused and meeting her incredulous eyes, smiled benevolently, "provided you're willing, of course," he added slowly.

"Are you making fun of me, Mr. Hardeman?" almost whispered poor Myra.

"Making fun o' you?" he echoed with vehemence. "May Hardeman be hanged if I am, Miss Thorn."

Tone and look were alike so convincing and satisfactory, that Myra had the fight of her life to keep from bursting into childish crying under his very eyes. Being an outlaw, however, he might change again at any instant.

"Then we'll start at once; I don't want any breakfast," she said, rising hastily. "Thank you, very much. Father 'll give you money—I won't

forget that, on the whole, you've been rather good—" Here her voice gave out, and her eyes filled with tears, but she smiled sweetly in default, and the man, after one glance at her, suddenly assumed the look of a deep-dyed culprit.

"I guess I'm one of those fellows the fool-killer missed last year, ma'am," he said, with a queerly hesitating, apologetic smile. Myra made no answer. "But I'll sit through this game now. Take my advice—don't waste any of your kind thoughts on Hardeman. As for your father's money, he knows better than to waste it."

Myra only shook her head doubtfully and vanished behind the boulder, from which she quickly reappeared, more composed, and carrying the rifle with rather a final air.

"You have a very good side, Mr. Hardeman—and perhaps you haven't had the opportunities of most men. But if you'll only promise me to reform I'll do everything I can to persuade the Governor to pardon you," she observed with grateful eyes and the merest hint of condescension.

"Thank you kindly!" It disturbed her that he actually smiled in amusement; but it was far worse to have him lay his hand arrestingly on the rifle.

"I'll carry that gun, if you please. I can shoot faster than you. If you're afraid of me—" he

loosed his big Colt from its place and handed it to her. "Better not ask the Governor to pardon me yet, you see."

His eyes were twinkling with kindly sarcasm, and Myra meeting them, took the revolver without a word, and they began the long journey homeward.

Explanation of the wondrous change that had come about in him was quite beyond her, tired as she was. The blessed feeling that she need not fear him, all strange and inexplicable though it was, grew and robbed her of the stimulus that had sustained her, and she became like a tired child in his hands.

The descent from the mesa she could never have made alone. But he helped her, directing, guiding her feet, holding her, all with such fine courtesy that she forgot to dread his arms. She had no alternative indeed about accepting his help, for without it she would have broken her neck.

All through the morning he seemed driven by the desire to atone to her, and Myra tacitly settled it in her own mind that it was for his past wickedness. She had not suspected he could be so sensitive on the point, nor show it by surrounding her with such fine delicate care. The old Hardeman had dragged her ruthlessly through and over obstacles, but this one care-

fully removed them from her path. She set the pace now, not he; and, half stupid with sleep and weariness as she was, the way seemed strangely easier.

One thing was certain. He was the most fearless man she had ever imagined. Although his chief enemy, the Sheriff of Wasco, must be lurking somewhere in the vicinity, and although every step brought her nearer to her friends, who would give him short shrift once they laid hands on him, he was quite undaunted. Quite evidently he found a kind of daredevilish entertainment in his situation. At times, Myra suspected, in her also.

At dinner time he chose the softest and most desirable spot possible, and seated her in it. He gave her food, and fetched water for her in the tin cup, and then seated himself at her feet, but a little way off.

"Do you know you're very queer? The Sheriff of Wasco is round here somewhere, and I don't believe you've given him a thought since this morning. Don't you fear him?" she asked.

"Do you?"

"Well, hardly. He's my friend. But you—I should think under the circumstances you'd feel rather uneasy."

"So should I, Miss Thorn." Pausing he smiled at her, the same sharp, quizzing smile

which had accompanied his gift of the revolver. "I'll tell you something that's true as the gospel," he said confidentially, "There's only one genuinely uneasy man anywhere in this vicinity—and he's the Sheriff of Wasco."

Myra laughed resentfully. "You're fairly cool. That's his rifle you've got there, I suppose, so you feel safe."

"Yes, ma'am, that's his rifle; and I do feel sorter safe as you say!" In spite of herself Myra liked the ring of his voice, the twinkle of his smiling eyes. She might have felt a premonition of a mistake somewhere. But she got no further than a vague wonder at him. Such a psychological problem as he offered was quite beyond her in her present befogged state of mind.

The meal over, he presented once more the over-worked tin cup, kneeling on one knee for her convenience.

"We're at Delmonico's in New York. This here's your finger bowl, Miss Thorn, and I am your humble waiter," he said smiling, but without special humility.

"I think you must be Dr. Jekyll," said Myra, rinsing her fingers. "Why, oh, why are you so kind to me now? You make me dread the moment when Mr. Hyde will come back."

He threw away the water behind him, but did not alter his attitude, while with wonder-

ful quickness the smile changed to a look of indignant concern. His voice was low but sharp.

"Was that villain really bad to you?"

"*That villain?*" repeated Myra in doubt.

"Yes—that I was to you; Mr. Hyde you know," he supplemented quickly.

At this question a rush of memory, memory of the night before, suffused the girl's face with a wave of outraged color.

"You certainly ought to know," she said coldly, and rising turned from him.

But there was no villainy in the anger which her flushed face had called into his, as he watched her choose another seat for herself further removed from his plainly dreaded vicinity. Smarting and chagrined he instinctively picked up his rifle, but it was no help to him.

"So—damn his soul!—that accounts for her keeping the revolver," he remarked softly. "He must have treated her outrageously. I'm a double-dyed jackass."

He started after her with purpose on his brow. But he checked himself as suddenly. When he came up to her the old courteous smile was restored, though some sign of effort was visible.

"Miss Thorn," he explained, standing bare-headed and straight before her, "Dr. Jekyll, as

you'll remember, took no stock in that partner of his, that man Hyde. I'm in his case exactly, you see. I'd wring Hyde's neck with the greatest of pleasure. I despise the dog,—but I have no recollection of his doings lately. Miss Thorn, if you see the least symptom of his return about me, I'll ask you please to shoot me dead."

Poor Myra! She believed she had monstrous cause for offense at him—but here he was inviting her to shoot him dead. And whatever he had been, plainly she had no need now to fear him. She stood wavering for an instant, but finally answered with a cold flicker of a smile:

"Thank you, Dr. Jekyll—I believe I will."

Quite gravely he replaced his cap. Raking together a little mound of pine cones and dry brush he took off his coat and fashioned a pillow in the shade.

"I suppose you won't believe me now, but I'll stake my head you're in no danger from Hyde or any other low sneaking wolf while I'm here to guard you.—I'd like it real well if you'd rest a little," and he waved his hand simply toward his arrangements.

Unless she was going to make herself needlessly ridiculous, there was no way of resenting his mild air of authority. Wondering peevishly what next she would do at his bidding, Myra walked over like a school-girl to the

place and lay down, pillowing her tired pretty head docilely on his coat.

She needed the rest dreadfully; but she would not close her eyes for one second, she stubbornly determined. If he took her for such a fool as that, he was well mistaken. Not all his pretending and clever juggling with character could blind her to what he was at heart. How long was this precious goodness of his going to last, indeed? Absolutely no telling; and if he *should* break out again, the last end would be worse than the first, very likely.—And there was still the night, for they could not reach her home till the next day. How could she face another night alone in these awful wilds with him.

For such an abandoned wretch, however, he could present an admirable assumption of innocence. His back was turned on her, and kneeling in the blazing sun, he was innocuously engaged in dipping his head in the spring, whence he had brought the water in that humorous tin cup of his. A most misleading badge, by the way, every thing considered. Oh, it was a pity he was not on the stage, where his acting and his splendid ability to masquerade as something which he was not might be turned to some useful account.

For the first time Myra regarded him with normally critical eyes. She had thought him a

heavier, bulkier man, but now his figure revealed a springiness, a virile ease of movement truly graceful. She could see the water glistening on his hair and sun-burned neck. What a queer assurance of beneficent manly strength radiated from his person! A month ago she would have trusted him on sight as a man whose strength would be her absolute safeguard.

He was handsome. Full of sleepy resentment at it, she admitted the fact. He had really fine features. The landscape was beginning to swim; dreams were taking the place of thoughts. If he should really be the good man he pretended to be! He should not be wicked with that face! One heard tales of dual personalities—suppose Hardeman and the Sheriff of Wasco were one and the same person. How funny—if this was the Sheriff of Wasco all the time, this same Hardeman—and no one knew it or suspected it but herself! With this airy fancy Myra lost the thread, and slipped away into utter unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN JOURNEY.

SHE slept dreamlessly, never moving a muscle or raising one of her dark eyelashes for some hours. Outlaw or sheriff—whatever he was, he had ceased to exist for her.

He discovered this state of affairs after it had lasted about ten minutes, and picking up his rifle he advanced cautiously. Amusement and a certain manly tenderness and solicitude strove for mastery in his face as he halted about five feet off from her and there observed her for the first time at his leisure.

He was troubled with no false modesty. She was no longer awake to snub him with those brilliant blue eyes of hers, so he looked his fill upon her beauty; and as he noted the lovely weary fling of her body, her cheek and dark wind-tossed head resting in tired confidence upon his coat, his amusement died away slowly. Was it fatigue that made her mouth so sweet, he wondered. As she lay there in her utter abandon of fatigue and dependence she was a sight

to stir any man to his centre, and the response she called into the brown keen face of this man was unworthy of the great outlaw Hardeman. Had Myra been awake she would have guessed the truth. He clutched his rifle with a grim gesture, and his gray blue eyes turned away and swept the wide valley with indignant vengeful intent.

Soon he found it warm standing there with the noonday sun shining full upon him, and moved to a point in shadow whence he could observe both Myra and the landscape with equal facility.

Still it was impossible but that she would interfere with his vision somewhat. They were alone upon a wild mountain side, he a brown young Westerner, filled to his finger-tips with the vigor and fire of life, and she a lovely woman, his ward, sleeping at his feet in utter dependence on him.

Her dress had suffered in her late experience. The sleeve of muslin and lace was torn almost to the shoulder, and the white arm within lay half-revealed in the languor of sleep, caressed by flickering leaf shadows and full of warm fugitive tints. Invisible tender threads radiated from it to the sentry's eyes and drew them again and again from the horizon and his duty.

"What the deuce was he about to tear her

dress like that?" he soliloquized in a fierce whisper. "Wish I could get just one good hold of him—and daylight. I'd settle this account o' hers on his dog's hide right off, before we come to Jeff's business." Stirred by the strength of his wrath he fingered the rifle yearningly but unconsciously.

But varying with all other emotions a look of perplexity was gradually creeping across his face. Once, when after a long, thoughtful scrutiny of the horizon his gaze returned to Myra, it turned to one of dismay.

"How am I goin' to get myself out of this here mess anyway? Doggone it, it's gettin' serious. I've been a smart Alec. That's about what I've been. An' plumb in the wrong place. She'll never speak to me again." He looked down at Myra with conviction, and grunted impatiently. "Serve me right. I've no use for a fool myself."

From the unpleasantness of this conclusion he could find no comfort apparently; so he took refuge after another interval in natural stubbornness.

"Face it out, that's the best way. Get her safe home, and never let on about the change of identity. What's the use? I've got no right to think about love-making with poor Jeff down there in Wasco waitin' to hear from me. Any-

way—a poor devil of a sheriff would stand no chance with such a girl as that.” He squared himself, and looked sternly beyond a strand of soft, dark hair which the zephyrs had snared upon a button of his coat beneath her head. He swore softly into the zephyrs. “Tomorrow I’ll go after Hardeman! I’ll have that satisfaction at least.”

His attention, however, came back quickly to that button on his buckskin coat. The lock of hair still waved there, darkly bright, and the rest of it lay across her body in a heavy disheveled braid, just as she had arranged it the day before at her waking of loneliness and fear on the mesa. His eyes rested on it till they grew covetous; but he fled temptation.

“Hanged if I’ll touch her while she’s asleep. The Sheriff of Wasco ain’t playing Hardeman to that extent quite.”

Once when her heavy sleep had grown so deep that even the faint movement of her breathing was imperceptible, he approached quietly. He had seen the phenomenon in exhausted men, but in her it drove him to panic. His bronzed cheek reddened darkly over the sweet intimate outlines of her neck and bosom ere he had satisfied himself that she was not dead from exhaustion in her sleep; then he backed off again precipitately, and once more took up his station as

groom of the bedchamber, a fine fire alight in the depths of his eyes as they resumed their watch for the evil-doer.

When the sun hung just above the western rim of the Pacific it was time to awaken her and continue their journey.

Awakening ladies had not heretofore been much in his line, and for some minutes he debated doubtfully how to accomplish it, but finally fell back on that close friend and adviser, his rifle. Audaciously near him, deceived perhaps by his great stillness, a weasel was pinning a struggling partridge to the earth. He fired.

He had not calculated on frightening her so greatly.

Myra sprang up, sleep and terror battling in her wide-open dazed eyes as they fell on his smoking rifle. A low, horrified shriek burst from her.

"Oh, what have you done?—where is he? Have you killed him?" she cried, clasping her hands in panic.

"Killed whom?" he asked in haste.

"Him—the Sheriff," she whispered, unable to command her voice.

Dark red flashed into his face. Without a word he walked over and picked up the dead weasel, presenting it to her with laconic apology.

"I just wanted to waken you, ma'am."

Poor Myra's rapidly clearing mind felt the sharp sting of mortification, which his demeanor in no wise helped. She would have given anything to have been a little less hasty in expressing her conclusions, and being herself in fault, she naturally longed to punish him.

"Oh—I see. Only a poor little weasel. But of course!—killing things is your strong point, isn't it?" With her blue eyes flashing, and her cheeks a mortified red, she looked as unpleasant as she possibly could with her natural limitations.

To her irritation, and great relief, he made no sort of answer. He did not even enlighten her that the weasel had been doing its own killing, but set about preparing supper with an air of patience. *Last night* Myra knew she would have been grossly insulted. It seemed almost worse to have to take a lesson in politeness from such a person.

She marched over and seated herself on a fallen log beside the martyred weasel. She wished to be queenly, but felt an annoying suspicion she was only pert. Then too, her sudden ill-temper having evaporated, she was aware of a dangerously strong sunny impulse to apologize for it and be a lady.

What right had he to make her feel humili-

ated, first with his weasel and then with his assumed good manners? He ought to be overwhelmed with contrition for his evil doings, but she was not at all certain that that was the root of his present goodness. Apology was unnecessary and silly, when any one of her men friends would shoot him on sight. She would be polite to him, of course, for the sake of her own dignity as well as safety. For no other reason. It was a little late for him—an outlaw—to put on the airs of a gentleman; he deceived no one but himself.

Just here she perceived by the corner of her eye that he was about to fetch her some water; so she arose and, stately, walked down to the spring herself, passing him with a smile as sweet and wintry as sunshine on arctic ice.

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Hardeman. It isn’t necessary to trouble you so,” she declared; and his unmistakable wincing soothed her self-respect greatly.

“He needn’t think he is imposing on me for one minute. I don’t forget his other side,” she reflected. Involuntarily, as the horrors of the night rolled back on her memory, she shuddered:

“Mercy, I don’t dare to forget it,” she whispered.

So, being well fortified in her resentment against him, she proceeded to grace the supper

he had prepared on the log. He explained apologetically that they had no tea, as it was inadvisable to light a fire at present.

"Of course. It might betray you to the Sheriff," Myra said with unnecessary impertinence.

"Exactly."

Again she felt rebuked. He had developed a surprising hauteur, difficult to pass, but not the less attractive.

"Miss Thorn, I want to give you some advice," he said, quietly and deliberately, "Don't concern yourself so much about that Sheriff. Some day you'll meet him, and then you'll be disappointed. I know him. He ain't altogether the man he sets out to be."

"Oh, indeed," she exclaimed, rather breathlessly, "I haven't the pleasure of knowing him; but perhaps if he were here you might not express yourself so freely about him. In fact, I don't think you would."

The fierce pleasure of insulting her companion blinded her to discretion and to the swift changes of expression on his face.

"He *ought* to be here, that Sheriff. He set out to rescue you from my clutches, didn't he?"

"Wait," Myra laughed confidently. "Men who know him better than you, say he never

fails. You may yet have the honor of introducing us, Mr. Hardeman——”

She checked herself precipitately. That wave of sunburned red that traveled across his face—was it anger? How steady his eyes were. Her own mocking ones dropped startled, and the blood rose unbidden in her cheeks; but when she looked up again his gaze was withdrawn.

“Living alone in the mountains is apt to give a man a touch of second-sight. You’ll meet the Sheriff some day. Do you know what’ll happen then? I’m going to tell you if you don’t mind.”

“Nothing especial, I fancy,” she said defiantly. “Why should it?”

“Because it’s so decreed. The Sheriff of Wasco will fall in love with—with a very sweet woman. And then”—he stopped short.

“Well?” inquired Myra. “Go on, please.”

“I’ve a notion the Sheriff of Wasco will be a fool for his pains.” Myra flashed him a brilliant, perplexed glance, but his face was a wall.

“Do you feel rested enough to start now? It’s an all-night trail, you know. I’m afraid you’re going to be very fatigued again.”

“Yes, I’m ready.” She was not quite dumb, though nearly so; but an obscure, astonished, outraged sense helped her out and as she arose, she cast on him a tolerant smile. “Even at the risk you mention, I hope you’ll have the chance

to introduce the Sheriff to me, Mr. Hardeman."

And her outlaw bowed.

In the sunset they renewed their march along the mountain-side. Below them lay the real forest, its green crowns still a sea of westerly light, but with solemn dimness encroaching upward from the lesser heights. Under their feet many thousands of dead leaves and tangled colonies of underbrush testified that here was none of the highways frequented of men.

Apparently her guard wished to retire into his own thoughts, so Myra was left to her own, perforce. One thing she admitted to herself. She was not afraid of him. She was even coming to feel an unwilling, rebellious sort of respect for him, absurd as it was under the circumstances.

When he spoke at last it was sudden and disconcerting. "There ought to be plenty of snakes around here."

There was a teasing gleam in his eye which Myra failed to see. She had the inborn horror of women for all the reptile family.

"Snakes," she cried stopping short, lifting her tattered skirts with a switch. "Where? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, just 'round here. Don't be scared. I'll see them before they get a chance to touch you," he answered soothingly.

"But how do I know you'll see them first? Why didn't you tell me there were snakes here?" she demanded in utter distress.

As he looked at her, poised for flight, her cheeks flushed again with consternation, the slight hauteur faded from his face.

"I'm sorry, but I never thought of it till this minute. Don't worry. You shan't be hurt, I'll give you my word. You see I'm so used——"

"Oh, of course you think I'm a perfect coward," protested Myra, "but I'm nothing of the kind. I'm just not going another step on this trail. We'll have to go around some other way."

"But there is no other way."

"Isn't there? Oh, dear!" Myra looked about in despair. "Well, I'll sit on the top of that rock then till daylight comes, if you'll help me up, please. I can't go on this way, Mr. Harde-man. I can't and I won't," she entreated.

"Well but, look here," he began earnestly.

"I can't and I won't," she repeated feverishly. "Why I might step on one of the awful things—and I should simply die." Her voice was lost in a shudder. "Help me over to that rock, please."

She would not stir without him because she dared not. There was a moment's fearsome deadlock while they faced each other, and the young man's wits worked rapidly.

"Well, a rock's a bad place to choose anyway. You'd likely find two or three families under there if you poked 'round. If you'll stand here just a minute I'll investigate a little."

"Oh!" shrieked Myra, "—don't! If you do—if you go near that stone I'll never speak to you again. What am I to do?" She glanced wildly all about her, but the silent scenery offered no help. "I wish—I wish I was back on the mesa," she wailed.

Her outlaw resolutely crossed the tiny wood-strewn space between them and took her hand reassuringly.

"Miss Thorn, I will do all that a man can do to protect you—from snakes and every other peril. I promise," he vowed with complete gravity. "Come, we'll go deeper into the woods; the old reptiles love these sunny places, you see. Remember, your father and friends are on the other side, waiting for us."

"Oh, I remember it." She withdrew her hand, and braced herself to meet the inevitable. "I'm going to step on a snake," she said tremulously. "But give me a good stick. Now go on—and *do* be careful. Oh, I hope you're as sorry for this dreadful business as you ought to be, Mr. Hardeman," she admonished the broad back already leading her into the depths of the forest.

Some hours more of journeying through dim woodland recesses, of clambering across fallen trees, and forcing a way through undergrowth that defied their passage, and the day-light filtering through the tree-tops above grew faint and died. With the darkness a great silence fell, a silence alive with the sounds of unseen life. Yet Myra's escort continued to beat out his way. But now he gave evidence of haste, and he had taken her hand and was drawing her steadily after him. She was content, for the greatness of the forest, its dim aisles peopled with she knew not what of gaunt shadows and prowling forms, was beginning to chill whatever of nerves the snakes had left her. For the hand of an outlaw, that hand with its firm, untroubled grasp inspired her with an extraordinary sense of protection and companionship.

After a little they emerged upon a clear space, a shallow ravine half filled up by the ages. To Myra's eyes the forest receded indefinitely. Welcome stars gleamed upon her from the deep blue abyss of heaven, and utter silence reigned all about, save for the monotonous whisper of the forest.

"Oh, let me rest a minute. We've come a hundred miles at least, haven't we?"

"About three miles. It might have been eight

or nine only for those plagued snakes," was the twitting answer.

"I know, but I couldn't help it. Maybe if you hadn't told me, you know—" said Myra, half apologetically.

A low, mollified laugh answered:

"'Twas certainly my fault, but I'll never repeat the mistake. Don't sit quite so near the edge of those trees, Miss Thorn. Here's a better place out here. Are you *very* tired? I've been hurrying you considerably."

He chose a seat better suited to his woodland instinct, beside a high boulder; and following him Myra wondered whether the darkness, which made his form taller and uncertain in outline, was not also wrapping him in a glamour of romance. His homage was certainly growing very acceptable. She liked the care, the assiduous personal care, he was bestowing on her comfort. While he stood above her, alert and watchful, yet feignedly so much at his ease, it was hard to think of him as an outlaw—abhorred and feared by the countryside and by all good women. In her inmost heart she suddenly wished he was no more than he seemed, a brave man, a courteous gentleman.

The silence which was the cloak of the forest fell upon their voices, weighting them to whis-

pers. They might have been forest lovers sitting there beneath the starlight, alone on the wild mountain top. Despite herself, Myra's animosity slipped away after her fears. Ever since the morning she had been forced to detain it with both hands.

"The moon will rise in about an hour. Till then we can rest. Hear the rustling of that aspen tree. Do you know the story of the trembling aspens, Miss Thorn?"

"No," she whispered. In the same tone, almost a whisper, he recounted the Indian legend of the aspen trees that fell in love with the snows on the mountain's summit. Climbing upward they preferred to shiver and tremble all the live-long summer for love's sake, rather than remain with the other trees in the valley and be exiled from love.

Myra listened with the same feeling of bewilderment she had experienced that morning. He was altogether inexplicable; and the glimpses of goodness she had seen in him, together with her gratitude and true womanhood, pointed out to her a duty.

"Mr. Hardeman," she essayed timidly, "I don't exactly understand you always, but I want to say that you've been very kind—extremely kind—to me since this morning, and I appreciate it."

There was no answer, but the figure beside her made a slight movement.

Myra's upturned face was like a pale night flower; her eyes shone darkly like benevolent stars as she went on:

"I may not see you again, so please don't resent this. I wish you weren't—I do wish you'd be a better man, Mr. Hardeman. I want you to be better. Father 'll speak to the Governor, and I'll be happy to do all I can to help. Won't you promise me?"

To her consternation he swooped down in silence, gathered her in a mighty grasp and swung her upward to the top of the boulder. Drawing his revolver from her belt where it had lain all day he thrust it into her hands.

"Take it, and whatever you see don't stir. Don't come down." His hands clung to the touch of hers, and his tone set her heart leaping helplessly. "Believe me—I would promise and I would do, anything in the world for your sake."

Immediately, before she could gasp an answer, he advanced rifle in hand a pace or two before her with his face turned toward the forest.

CHAPTER X.

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE.

STRAINING her eyes in the same direction, Myra remained palpitating on the boulder. The forest seemed one impenetrable black wall, threatening everywhere alike. But after a moment or two she caught a sound, the sharp crack of dead wood; the underbrush rustled loudly as if in the grasp of a high wind, then dead silence prevailed once more.

Fear got the better of every other emotion in Myra.

“What is it?” she breathed.

“Some animal. Don’t be alarmed. We’re ready for him,” he answered without turning his head.

The silence continued. Somewhere at the edge of the thicket undefined wild eyes had them under observation. Perhaps because these humans standing in the starlight were two, or perhaps because of the warlike attitude of one of them, the intruder was taking counsel with caution.

Not for long, however. A louder crackle of

dead branches, then a heavy footfall that scorned the need of strategy, and with a movement like lightning the man's arms went up; fire spouted from the unseen rifle, and the silence fled reverberating.

Myra saw the forest wall give up a huge dark body, which rolled swiftly in their direction, emitting grunts and roars of rage. Fire flashed and flashed from the rifle without checking the advance, while the hillside and forest took up the clamor vociferously. As the animal came out into the open the man looked small beside him. Myra closed her teeth on a shriek as she saw it. She was learned enough in forest lore to recognize a grizzly, and a big one.

The bear was badly hurt, though not vitally, and full of fight. One of the shots had lodged in his flank, partly laming him, but he came on like a catapult toward his enemy. The rifle was silent, while the man, motionless, covering the girl's position with his, awaited the favorable moment to shoot. Then once again, as the bear rose, growling frightfully, his wicked eyes gleaming, and with huge arms extended, a spurt of flame leaped from the rifle.

A roar of pain and fury burst from the wounded animal's throat. Shaking his head fiercely he dropped to all fours for a moment. Myra heard a strong voice ring out cheerfully:

"That was a good one. Are you all right?"

"Yes. Don't worry about me," she cried feverishly. "Oh——"

The bear was up on his hind feet again, higher than the man, and of thrice his bulk, his jaws agape and running with white foam and blood. The stench of his great body was well nigh unbearable. It seemed that the man must surely be overwhelmed unless he moved. But again with the rifle muzzle almost touching the huge throat, he fired. A mighty cuff from one of the big paws reached him as the bear came crashing down, and the two rolled to the earth simultaneously, and the weapon upon which the man and woman depended for safety was knocked far beyond reach.

Not a scream, but a stifled little gasp, came from the boulder's top. The man nimbly regained his feet, but there was no time for anything but his hunting-knife and he struck again and again, but could not reach a vital spot, while his agility alone kept him beyond reach of the deadly claws.

He might have worked towards his rifle, but he would not leave the boulder uncovered. To the mind of the girl above him came flashing the memory of the previous night. *Then* she would have wished him dead. But now——. With a white face and muscles all tense she grasped the

revolver, but she could not pull the trigger; her hand was stiff and palsied. Her arm trembled, and the stars in the glimmering heavens seemed to move, as before a screen. Her heart heaved and she felt herself weakening. With a despairing cry she let the weapon slip down from her hand.

“Get it,” she cried hoarsely, “the Colt.”

He stood below her, quivering with the lust of battle. As the bear lunged forward, mouth agape and arms swinging ahead of its lumbering body, he side-stepped and brought his arm forward in a circle, burying the knife into the smoking body. Then, quick as thought, he bent and kicked the revolver before him, and darting beyond the animal stooped and secured it. But the great hulk was now standing over him; the hot breath was rushing past his face and the odor of blood and animal thickened the air. As the grizzly's arms swung over him he ducked, but they closed upon him. With his left arm crooked to protect his face and neck in the deadly embrace, his right brought the Colt's muzzle to the reeking body. A flash, another and another; the muffled sounds of the shots rose faintly to Myra's ears, and then she beheld the great mountain of flesh and muscle fall over the man, and saw the red dripping tongue curl on the great white teeth in a spasmodic move-

ment, and the giant clawed arms relax. Next instant the man pulled himself free, and jumping back, stumbled breathlessly toward her, bloody and pale, his chest heaving and his whole lithe body quivering with the strain.

"God," he whispered, "you saved us with that revolver."

"Lift me down," she whispered back weakly. And he reached up and slowly and carefully lowered her.

But the strain had been terrible. As her feet touched the ground she clung to him for a moment, white lipped and dizzy and trembling. Then softly and limply she slipped through his hands to the ground and covered her face.

"Oh! what a fight," she sobbed, "What an awful, awful monster. When he got those big arms round you, I thought we were both gone. Are you sure you're not hurt anywhere?"

She raised her eyes, large and sweet with solicitude, and questioned him. Fear had torn off all conventions and left her just a woman, with a woman's mission to comfort and heal the man who had fought for her.

"I've nothing to show but the blood I guess," he answered smiling. "But I must find water. Shall I fetch you some here, or——?"

Myra sprang up, an April smile hastily chasing off the tears.

"No, no, I'll wait on myself. Goodness, you don't think I'd let you out of my sight for one minute, do you? There might be more grizzlies."

So, a dilapidated but friendly pair, they set out to look for a spring.

They found one just as the moon was coming up, fair and silvery, flooding the face of the silent wilds with light.

He, true cavalier still, must needs satisfy her thirst first, and then, while he cleansed away the signs of battle, she stood near and waited, comrade like. She no longer thought and argued with herself. He had escaped. She felt a singular gladness over the fact, mingling with the joyous sense that he had established a right to her respect as well.

Following this adventure they kept carefully to the heights, with the silvered, treacherous forest lying asleep below them.

Once when they had travelled a long way in silence, he pulled up quite suddenly with a smothered exclamation. Drawing out his revolver he glanced at its loaded chambers and handed it to her.

"I forgot you wanted to carry this," he said.

Myra's face grew hot. But as her upraised startled glance met his for an instant, a baffling

something she saw lying deep in his eyes moved her to take the weapon quietly from him.

"It's a useful little toy, isn't it?" she said, raising the murderous revolver admiringly till it gleamed in the moonlight, "—when it's in proper hands," she added. "It's heavy, too. Won't you kindly carry it for me, Mr. Harde-man?" And she handed it back, while all her woman's dignity and sweetness were in the smile she gave him.

He gravely restored the weapon to its place. "Remember you may have it any time you wish," he said, quite unembarrassed.

As they walked along Myra was not wholly sure how she had come out of the episode. Such queer sensitiveness about honor in an outlaw! But her respect for him, which had been creeping upward all day, mounted defiantly, and she felt strangely happier for her vote of confidence in him.

At midnight he stopped their march, and having found her a comfortable nook he once more seated himself at her feet and drew out the slender remnant of food from his wallet. Presently, with a smile in which many feelings strove for expression, regret being chief, he looked up:

"Just about sunrise you'll be taking breakfast at home in Hilltown, Miss Thorn."

"Oh, shall I?" said Myra joyfully, and then silence seemed to clip the words short.

"Your father will be glad," he said without spirit.

"Dear old Daddy, I guess he will," said Myra, smiling, but thoughtful.

"You'll be safe out of Hardeman's clutches, too. I don't ask if you'll be glad. It isn't necessary," he pursued.

Myra's silence read like assent. Meeting it, he struck the turf viciously with his hunting knife.

"I was wondering what *you* are going to do at sunrise, Mr. Hardeman," she said softly at last.

In a dim way, and to relieve an undefined heartache in herself, Myra had the missionary idea in mind again. But a glance from the gray-blue eyes shot to hers and she felt as though she had encountered a lightning bolt.

"I'm going to follow that advice you were giving me to-night when the grizzly struck us.—Remember? It was good advice—for Hardeman or any man," he answered.

Myra remembered distinctly—several things about that incident, and she forsook the missionary idea.

"You've been following it very nicely, I think,"

she said, her face warm, and her eyes a little rebuking.

Two or three minutes elapsed. Myra was striving helplessly not to acknowledge a bond, which she felt growing in the silence. He pursued:

"There's my friend, the Sheriff. You'll see him. Of course you'll put him on my trail, I suppose."

Apparently he was intently studying the horizon. Or so thought Myra.

"Why do you suppose that?" she demanded uncertainly.

"It's your duty.—Besides you have other reasons," he said slowly and distinctly.

Despite her surprise and irritation Myra felt that she must be judicial. He should not have dragged the difficulty of her position into the light like that—in that reckless, sardonic way of his.

"Yes, it is my duty. But you said just now you would follow—you said you'd reform," she reminded him.

"That won't cut any ice with the Sheriff."

"But you will keep the promise," she insisted entreatingly. "You see I don't have to take any man's ideas of right and wrong—not even the big Sheriff of Wasco's," said Myra, with slight asperity on the name.

She did not see his look of triumph. By great art he had diverted her loyalty from a man's name to a man—himself. It was right that he should penitently and humbly whisper as he took her hand.

"I will keep my promise. You make me deeply ashamed of myself, Miss Thorn."

Just after daybreak he showed her through the trees a long, low cabin, the sight of which seemed strange, and yet oddly familiar. Two or three men were moving briskly about it.

"Why—the patrol!" burst forth Myra delightedly.

"Certainly; the patrol. The bunch that's out looking for me, you know," he supplemented. His face was alight with smiling daredeviltry. "Miss Thorn, give them my kindest regards, won't you? I guess I'll go no further."

"Oh, don't joke about it," cried Myra. She surveyed him with a pained and doubtful look. Then she gave him her hand, regret and pity, and other things she knew not of in her blue eyes.

"Goodbye," she whispered "—goodbye, and thank you. I'm so sorry. I hope some day I shall meet you again as a good citizen, Mr. Hardeman."

"When next you see Hardeman he'll be a much better citizen, Miss Thorn, I promise," he answered in a voice most gentle and enigmatic

"Goodbye." Bareheaded he bowed over her hand and kissed it, and next moment had vanished among the trees, unsatisfactory to the last.

But for no great distance however. Strongly disgusted with himself he stood concealed and watched her progress, noting that once she stopped to look backward hesitatingly.

"Scalp me for an idiot," he muttered heartily. "Hang my wall-eyed sense of humor. I've had my joke and what's the result? Simply I've fooled her into believing she was influencing that profligate Hardeman for good,—and she'll never forgive me when she learns the truth." Here Myra stopped to give that sad little backward look, and his eyes glowed. "She's the one woman, all right.—I'd go down on my knees to her, but it wouldn't help me any." His hand unconsciously wandered to his hip, where the revolver's touch recalled him. A gleam of satisfaction and hatred lit the smoldering disgust of his countenance. "I'll start after that unholy reprobate right now, and make him pay," he hoarsely articulated.

As Myra disappeared and he swung back toward the trail a further consideration came to cheer him.

"I switched her off the Sheriff of Wasco, however." A grin of delight parted his lips. "Darned if I didn't get jealous of my own self hearing her talk about the Sheriff."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHERIFF UNDER FIRE.

GREAT was the rejoicing when Myra, ragged and exhausted, was escorted into Hilltown by the big, tender, indignant patrolmen into whose care she had been committed.

She met her father as he was about to head another expedition to go in search of her. Poor Mr. Thorn had returned post-haste to Hilltown the moment the news had reached him, making the long, arduous journey on horseback; and had instantly thrown all his energies into the gathering and organizing of search parties. Men had come from far and near at his call, eager in their offers of help and sympathy; for the name of Hardeman was one at which all the region arose with angry threats of vengeance.

The old gentleman met his daughter and her patrolmen escort quite unexpectedly. All Hilltown witnessed the pathetic meeting, and added its tears to theirs in pure appreciation of the joy of the occasion; afterwards scattering to its cabins to discuss the strange momentous fact

that Myra had been brought back quite unharmed.

With Captain Butts and his men especially it was a subject of wise speculation. Many theories were advanced to account for it, as the puzzled shifts sat around the camp fire and talked of Hardeman's sudden and unaccountable goodness.

"Think of his cheek, fetchin' her right to the edge of this here clearin'. Tell you he got rattled," said Jenks of Oregon. "He got wind that the Sheriff o' Wasco was on his tracks an' thought he'd square himself."

"Course he did. The Sheriff sent him a telegram through the Devil's Pass to say he was comin!" growled Jones sarcastically.

"Well, give us your opinion, Mr. Jones, if you're such a wise guy," retorted Jenks, nettled.

"Ain't got no opinion. It's too blamed intricate for me."

"Well, I have. I'll bet you that there Sheriff had something to do with it."

"Shucks! You've got sheriff on the brain, Jenks. Didn't she say 'twas Hardeman as brought her back? She'd oughter know, I s'pose."

"Maybe. I ain't so sure. What I'd like to know is this," and Jenks pointed his pipe across

the fire at Jones, who sat on the other side,—
“why ain’t we heard nothin’ from that Sheriff yet? It’s been two days an’ a couple o’ nights since he polished off Bill an’ Dutch here. Now what d’ you s’pose he’s been doin’ meanwhile? Washin’ cobwebs off’n the sky?”

“Nit!” retorted Jones, disgustedly. “Maybe he’s dead.”

“Maybe he ain’t. Have you taken into consideration in that there profuse gray matter of your top-knot that this here Sheriff looks a heap like Hardeman, an’ that there might be some sort of a shuffle in the cyards.”

“That’s the looniest proposition ever was promulgated outside of a bug-house, Jenks. You’re off. You’ve got Sheriff o’ Wasco in yer attic.”

“Maybe I have,” assented Jenk good-naturedly, “but there’s got to be some sort of an explanation as fits the case. That there Harde-man never would give up a woman like Miss Thorn unharmed an’ alive; an’ you fellows know that quite well.”

There was much truth in Jenks’ remarks and the mystery certainly was deep.

Next evening Bill Thomas and Dutch, who had gone into Hilltown, returned to the circle round the camp fire with the startling news that the man who brought Miss Thorn home had worn a visored cap.

"He did, eh? Who told you?" inquired Butts.

"Her father did. He's lookin' fer a man answerin' to that description. Me an' Dutch had a notion we was lookin' fer him too, but we didn't say nothin'!" ventured Thomas.

Jenks sprang up. "What did I tell you? Who's got trouble in their attic now? Seems to me that this here congregation stands convicted. You wouldn't recognize the possibilities o' that Sheriff—you wouldn't, you set o' peanut brains."

"Shut up, Jenks. You're liable to bust yer gall, excitin' yerself like that," said Butts. "This outlaw Hardeman wore a mask when he took Miss Thorn away, didn't he?"

"Suppose he did!" retorted Jenks sarcastically, "then would he be liable ter throw it off a coming back, like this gentleman who returned with her done? And would he be liable to wear a visored cap? That there roofing belongs to the Sheriff o' Wasco, sure as thunder."

"You're dead right," cried Butts, "You're dead right, Jenks—and it becomes this here lay-out sure, to see that this Sheriff gets received according to Hoyle when he sticks his foot-prints in this camp again."

The men were not slow to appreciate what their captain had said.

"We'll make him confess all about it," yelled one.

"We'll make the sly Sheriff cavort around like one of them there yaller-haired soubretties on the stage over in Seattle," cried another.

"We'll ask him why—we will," chorused the the crowd. They were all happy at a chance to vent their grim humor on the unsuspecting Sheriff; and they got up from around the camp fire and walked about in groups here and there, discussing plans how best to make the sinner repent.

Butts was standing with Jenks and Jones near the fire when suddenly they became aware of the presence of a stranger near them. At the same moment everyone in camp saw him, and instinctively they closed around him. He was standing facing Captain Butts, the fire-light illumining his tanned and handsome face. His Winchester was grounded, its barrel resting in his left hand. Upon his head was a visored cap, cocked slightly backward in challenging attitude. He looked keenly at Butts and then his voice rang out, melodious and pleasant.

"I'm a stranger hereabouts, gentlemen. Which one is Jenks of Oregon, an old acquaintance of mine?—And is this Captain Butts of the patrol?"

He advanced a step towards the group as he

spoke, his eyes twinkling and his face bearing a half-quizzical smile.

Jenks stepped forward in an instant.

"Sheriff," he cried. "I'm darned glad to see you. This here is Captain Butts."

They shook hands vigorously and a subdued growl of welcome rang from the men. "The Sheriff of Wasco," they cried, "the Sheriff, for sure."

Then every man was personally introduced to the new arrival. Dutch and Thomas hung back to the last, but the boys began to laugh, and they ambled forward and took the Sheriff's proffered hand. There was a moment of strained suspense, then the Sheriff drew his Colt carelessly and glancing at its chambers and at his belt remarked directly to Dutch and Thomas:

"Do either of you boys happen to have a few cartridges you can spare? I'm short."

In the great woodlands and mountains of the West, to ask for and obtain a few cartridges was really often a mark of friendship. The favor was seldom refused, and never asked where there was much danger of refusal.

Dutch and Thomas instantly unbuckled their belts: "Here, Sheriff, you can have the cartridges and the guns too, if your'n is outer order."

"Nope," smiled the Sheriff, "no, thanks, my 45's all right," but he stooped and pulled a few

cartridges from both belts and placed them in his own.

Dutch and Thomas felt keenly honored. They forgot about the licking they had had, and all the other boys, watching closely and uncertainly, suddenly realized that the Sheriff was a diplomat.

They grinned, and Miguel the Italian turned to the man next to him.

"Thata Sheriff is a slicka gentaman," he whispered.

But somehow, in spite of the visitor's friendliness, they did not find it so easy to quiz him as they had anticipated. It was the gigantic Jones, sprawling on his stomach beyond the fire, who finally raised a pair of shrewd, humorous eyes to the guest's face and broached the important question.

"Say, Sheriff, us boys has got a argyment we'd like to have you referee, if you don't mind. We'd like to know the name o' the man as brung Miss Myra back home."

The Sheriff seemed unconscious that twenty-four gleaming eyes were leveled like Colts at his face. He looked innocently surprised.

"Why, she says herself 'twas Hardeman, don't she? Where's yer argument? I don't catch on."

"Yes, she says 'twas Hardeman. But, from certain matters what you might call circumstan-

tial evidence, this camp is led to the belief she don't know who it was. We surmised as how you might be able to enlighten us."

"Can't do it, boys—sorry," said the Sheriff, shaking his head.

"Can't! That surely is a disapp'intment to us, ain't it, boys?" said Jones, looking round the circle. "By all accounts now, this here Harde-man is plumb gentlemanly when he takes the notion. You hadn't oughter shoot him, Sheriff, he's too good."

"Real sociable an' perlite, he is."

"Belongs in a Sunday school."

"He ain't no real outlaw," came in sarcastic chorus. Jones' jaws worked monotonously on a quid of tobacco, but his eyes never wandered from the Sheriff's face.

"You see," he resumed slowly, "that outlaw as brung her back—pervided he's the same as took her off—wore some sort of a cap on his dome o' thinks. That's sorter unusual around here."

"Hardeman comes from Wasco," was the instant retort. "We sell caps down there, boys."

A dozen unbelieving grins passed round the fire. "Caps or no caps, it's hard work to sell this here camp," began Butts. "There's only one thing I don't like 'bout this rescuin' business," he mused, his eyes twinkling. "Allowin'

as Hardeman reformed an' did bring her back, he didn't have no right to kiss her when he said good-bye. That's scand'lous."

In a flash the Sheriff turned on Butts. "It's a lie, he didn't kiss her," he said quietly but furiously.

"How do you know?" drawled Butts. "Was you there?"

But the crowd leaped up and piled onto the Sheriff, who instantly perceived his fatal mistake.

"We're on, Sheriff, we're on," roared the men. "Own up. Be a man," and they grabbed him and raised him on high on a stump. "Speech, you son of a gun!" they cried. "Tell us all about it. Enlighten this here congregation."

The Sheriff was stage struck. "I realize," he began,—“you're on.”

"Quit kiddin', Sheriff," they bawled, "'an tell us why you hid your light under a bushel. Why didn't you tell her who you was?"

The young man on the stump looked defenceless for the first time in his adventurous life.

"Say, boys, go easy on him. Maybe he's in love," said Butts facetiously.

"Nothing o' the sort," retorted the Sheriff, red in the face. "I didn't tell her because—well I had certain reasons o' my own that wouldn't appeal to your profound judgments. Anyway

what was the use o' tellin' her. I ain't anythin' except a poor six hundred dollar sheriff from Wasco."

"In love, sure," muttered the crowd, "he's plumb locoed."

Butts explained. "He means, boys, she's a millionaire's daughter, an' his six hundred dollars don't give him much chance, but he's got hopes. He's hit sure."

"We're with you, Sheriff, we're with you," they chorused heartily.

But as the Sheriff began to answer, a shot rang out in the distance. He turned half round on the giant stump and brought his hand heavily to his side. Then he pitched forward into the arms of his new-found friends below.

"Hell!" came in furious emphasis from the crowd, "he's hit."

They lowered him carefully to the ground. But reaching for his weapon he raised himself to his knees and faced the distant woods from whence had come the shot. His face was lighted with a vengeful fury and weakly he staggered to his feet.

"Stop him," they cried as one man, "he's hard hit," and they surrounded him while he struggled fiercely to shake them off and be free, his hand pressing savagely against the bleeding wound in his side. Then suddenly his face grew

white; they overpowered him and he sank back weakly into their arms with a last glance of dying fire towards the covert that concealed his foe.

“That was Hardeman’s speech you got, boys; a far better one than mine,” he whispered in baffled rage, and then lapsed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XII.

A HARDENED SINNER.

THEY carried the wounded man to a small cabin adjoining the main one, known as the "Sick House," where they succeeded in staunching the flow of blood and in bringing the Sheriff back to consciousness.

They realized that it was well-nigh hopeless to try and capture the outlaw, but still a detachment started vigorously after him. Not, however, before it was firmly understood that no one should mention the Sheriff of Wasco's presence in the camp. Butts realized that the moral effect on the settlement would be bad if the true facts were known, and he commanded silence as to the identity of the injured man.

It sufficed that a man had been "accidentally" shot at the camp; and thus was the story promulgated.

That night a physician by the name of Backer came in response to Butts' earnest call. He probed the wound by the light of a lantern and, aided by two of the men, operated upon the Sheriff and removed the bullet. Then with

painstaking care he dressed it with spick-and-span white sterilized gauzes and other modern products which proved the advance of civilization even in these remote corners of the continent. By this time the Sheriff was as sick as a man need be, for he had refused to take an anæsthetic, preferring to chew on a piece of bandage and keep an eye on the manipulations of the surgeon. The Sheriff had never been sick before in his life, and the suffering he underwent on account of one little bullet was a new experience and a revelation to him.

One day the doctor came unexpectedly upon Mr. John Thorn and his daughter on the highway. The assurance that the outlaw had been followed far to the south-east had done much to quiet all fears, and Myra was again seen about the trails and the cabins of Hilltown. She had been quite seriously affected by her late fearful experience, but, thanks to the thousand kindnesses showered upon her, and to Doctor Backer's good care, she was beginning to be her own self again.

She spied the physician coming slowly along the highway atop of his well cared for horse, and hastened ahead to meet him.

"Doctor, how's the sick patrolman, the one who got shot?" she inquired with sympathy in her voice and face.

Now the doctor was in the secret up at the camp, and he sympathized greatly with the Sheriff, especially as he knew Miss Thorn; he decided therefore that he was on delicate ground.

"Oh, he's fine. Just got shot up a little. He'll soon be well now."

"But you've been riding a score of miles every day for a fortnight to see him," she said, smiling doubtfully. "I'm afraid you're not telling me the facts, Doctor. Which of them is it? I know them all."

"I never was good on names," said Dr. Backer, shaking his head and trying to move off. "It's a bad fault of mine. Always remember a face, though."

"Well I'll go up there to-morrow and find out," she cried after him. "Those poor fellows never get any proper attentions when they're sick—except what you give them of course."

Dr. Backer instantly reined in his horse and looked sober. There was danger that the Sheriff would receive a call unless he managed things better. He was not sure what the consequences would be.

"No, no; you couldn't go near the fellow. He's a villainous looking object. It wouldn't be safe, by thunder; he is as delirious as a hat-pin," remonstrated the doctor.

Myra laughed.

“Oh, no. He’s fine. He’ll soon be well now—you said so yourself. Now I know he’s very bad, and I’m going anyway.” She shook her finger at his concerned face. “Why, Doctor, you couldn’t deceive even poppa.—And he’s easy,” she said tenderly, as she took her protesting parent’s arm and they walked off together.

The doctor went his way, laughing to himself.

“She’ll go, if she’s a woman. And I ain’t all sorry either. There’s an’ interesting time coming for the Sheriff, I guess. It’s up to him now.”

Next day Myra—now always carrying a revolver—took the stage to camp, intent upon visiting the injured woodman. Such visits were not unusual in the past; she had never hesitated to help any of the men or the women in those lonely regions, who were really dangerously ill. Now more than ever she owed her gratitude to her friends the patrolmen, who had done their best to save her.

When she arrived in camp on this particular day the place was literally asleep. Butts and the night shift were in the main cabin, and only Yang Foo was awake.

He came trotting to meet “Miss Tornee,” divining that she had come to see the sick man, and innocently believing that she knew he was the famous Sheriff of Wasco. Yang Foo wished to be polite and gentlemanly, and neither he nor

his mate supposed the caution they had received concerning the sufferer's identity included the lady who was such a vitally interested party. So Yang Foo kow-towed, and pointing to the hospital cabin sing-songed:

"He velly bladly smashee. He gottee go to flunelal."

"Poor man! Let me see him, Yang Foo. Tell him Miss Thorn wants to see him."

"Yes I slayee," nodded Foo as he scurried off to the sick man. He fully believed Myra had come to thank the Sheriff for saving her, and not for a moment would he, Yang Foo, keep a lady away who had come so far on such a mission.

He appeared before the convalescent, grinning all over.

"She comee."

The Sheriff of Wasco turned and raised himself on his elbow and eyed the Chinaman suspiciously.

"She!—who's she?"

Foo grinned harder than ever. "She! she comee longee; she wantee talkee Sheliff Wasco."

"She wants to talk with the Sheriff of Wasco, does she? She came a long way, did she?"

The Sheriff meditated. There was a girl away back in Wasco once, who had with remarkably good taste been smitten with him, but whom he had carefully tried to avoid to prevent a scene.

He had not seen her for years, but he dreaded her attentions, and hearing that she had moved North about a year before, he had felt some uneasiness. He was doubly uneasy now.

He caught Foo by the collar of his blouse and whispered: "Tell the lady I'm an Italian, and don't know her. Tell her I'm dying."

Yang Foo thought this singular, but he toddled out and told Myra that the Italian was dying.

The tears came to the girl's eyes as she gently tiptoed towards the cabin, and cautiously looked into the gloom.

The Sheriff of Wasco saw her and realized instantly that something must be done. This was the girl he loved, though he loved her without hope, knowing his own poor place in the world's affairs. Besides, all the reasons, wise or foolish, that had prevented him before from declaring himself to her were still in force; and therefore he brought himself to a sudden and marvellously quick realization that he had better be Hardeman again. He must stifle the growing flame of love that had kindled in his breast; he must be strong; he must away with the idea. His sphere in life was one that could not and should not touch hers.

His lips moved as he saw her face peering at him from the doorway. It was a face showing the shadow of her late experience, and gentle

with human kindness. It was beautiful and sweet, and it radiated the spirit of young womanhood.

“Miss Thorn—come in!” he said in a voice of mingled surprise and joy.

She hesitated at the curious accent. It was familiar certainly, and just as certainly not that of any ordinary Italian. And its owner was not dying—that was a blunder on Yang Foo’s part evidently. She stepped past the threshold and gazed at the invalid; then she stepped back in fright and amazement.

“Mr. Hardeman ?—you—you here ?”

The Sheriff of Wasco turned painfully towards her and she saw he was utterly helpless. Fright vanished and a feeling of dismay seized her, and she sat down on a chair and gazed at him. How pale and wan he looked, and how thin; and still there was that twinkle in his eyes that had so attracted her when he brought her back to civilization.

“Yes, I’m here for keeps, I guess,” drawled the sick man melodiously. “Serves me right, Miss Thorn—as you’re thinking, no doubt. I’ll never do it again, though—certain.”

“You’ll never steal a woman again ?” she faltered, not knowing exactly what to say next; but then she rallied. “I’m afraid you’re fatally hurt, Mr. Hardeman.”

The Sheriff's heart smote him, but he threw a most Hardeman like harshness into his voice. "Your opinion of me is a bad one, lady. I must be fatally hurt never to steal a woman again—eh?" He chuckled. "Sinners have been known to repent, Miss Thorn, and I certainly am sinner enough to start in on that line—what do you think?"

"I think that if you get well and become a good man, as we said, you'll never regret it," she said gently. After all there was good in him. She had seen it many a time.

He shook his head sadly, this Sheriff of Wasco, and groaning just enough to bring an exclamation of pity from her, remarked:

"If I get well I'll be hanged. These boys will learn my identity—and I'd better die easy like."

"Don't they suspect who you are?" she asked cautiously.

"They think they know," nodded the invalid. "They think I'm the Sheriff of Wasco, and that Hardeman shot me. But you know better, don't you? Upon you hangs my life or death."

It would be wrong to say as he met her shocked eyes, that the reprobate was altogether unhappy. He grinned over the picture of his wickedness, but he pulled a blanket over his mouth and chin first, and poor Myra, after a mo-

mentary suspicion, decided he was suffering, and her face saddened in pity.

"You see," he continued lugubriously, "it's your duty to civilization to expose me; to tell them that I'm that blood-dyed villain Harde-man. And of course you've got to do it. And they won't give me a chance to reform. They'll hang me, and I guess that's what I deserve anyway." He sighed the sigh of a badly-wounded and generally-despondent man.

Myra was a thorough woman.

"Duty," she said scornfully. "You stole me, but you brought me back—didn't you? I'll stand by the secret—duty or no duty."

The sick man shook his head in a melancholy way. "Forgive me—but you're a woman," his voice cracked queerly, and he forbore to look at her outraged face. "A good sweet woman," he added hastily, "—and you don't know half my crimes. When I think of what I am this minute—I know I richly deserve hanging. No, ma'am, far better if I don't get well."

Myra stamped her foot indignantly.

"Yes, I'm a woman, but I can keep a secret. And I will, if you will honestly try to reform and get well again."

"Get well! Why should you care a continental whether——?" he paused, the sick hypocrite.

and turned the flash-light of his gray-blue eyes on her inquiringly.

"Oh," she said scathingly, "because then you'd get out of the country. I want to know you're a thousand miles from here at least. Don't get it into your head that I'm falling in love with you. I assure you I would not have come within ten miles of you if I had known it was you."

The Sheriff of Wasco gazed at the ceiling in silence. It cost him no effort to assume the look of desolation and misery that suddenly crept across his face. *She fall in love with him?* —Of course not. But to wish him a thousand miles away from her! That stung intolerably. And he had certainly behaved abominably in his conception of a difficult duty, and had earned her contempt.

Myra saw the expression and her heart misgave her. "I didn't mean that. I was cruel. Of course I would come to see anybody who was hurt," she said relently.

He nodded. "Yes; you'd have come to see a dog if it was hurt." There was an element of bitterness in his voice, and she did not answer. He pulled himself back to his duty with a violent wrench. Raising himself on his elbow he looked at her, and if the part he meant to play was Hardeman's, the half-sad mockery of his

laugh was entirely the Sheriff of Wasco's own production.

"You see, ma'am, I'm so much worse'n a dog it worries me to see you wastin' time tryin' to convert me. I'm just gone to the bad—absolutely. I'm goin' to be hanged as soon as I'm well—" here he dropped his voice to a terrifying earnestness "—so I'm just goin' to kill a few of these fellows 'round here first, and escape to the wild, unrestrained life of a man without a conscience!"

Myra jumped to her feet in alarm.

"Don't kill anyone," she cried in terror. "Get away as soon as you can—and try—try—oh, do try, Mr. Hardeman—do try to be good."

Deeply afraid of what his combined wickedness and despair might lead him to do, she approached his bed, extending her hand spontaneously, and whispering: "I'll pray for you, Mr. Hardeman—Goodbye."

He greedily seized the proffered hand and clasped it most gently in his own. It was so delicate, so warm, so lovely—he closed his eyes for a moment in furious shame.

"Don't pray for Hardeman, Miss Thorn," the voice and the expression were ferocious. "Pray for the Sheriff of Wasco;—he needs it."

"Oh—what?" she pulled her hand back, and

pressed it against her cheek, looking at him fear-stricken. "Are you going to murder him? Oh—I'm afraid I've done wrong to promise you anything," and greatly perturbed she turned her back on him and walked out of the cabin.

Left alone the invalid stared at the ceiling for a minute or two, while a thousand expressions chased each other across his face.

"It's a shame. It's a downright shame—but what could I do?" he asked angrily. Then reaching out for some tobacco from the little table at the head of his bunk, he rolled and lighted a cigarette and began puffing away, the old dare-devil humor returning irresistibly. "Murder the Sheriff of Wasco! It won't be necessary. I'll bet she'll be ready to do it herself; she'll be as mad as a hornet when she finds out.—And it's just as well for me," he brooded savagely as he blew a wreath of blue smoke towards the rafters. "It's just as well for me—damn it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE RAMPAGE.

MYRA was in a most distressed state of mind when she arrived in Hilltown. Here was Harde-man passing as the Sheriff of Wasco to the men at the camp, and she had foolishly promised to keep his secret.

There was no use believing in his reformation. She was not sure he was sincere; and far too much was at stake. Now that she viewed it all from afar, she realized that she was doing a great wrong to justice not to reveal the true state of affairs as she saw it.

While her outlaw had undoubtedly been kind to her during those last hours she was in his hands, still that should have nothing to do with the case. He was a notoriously wicked man, who was wanted for many other offenses. And to think that he now *dared* to pose as the Sheriff of Wasco! Her dilemma was great. She had learned to have a vague admiration for him on that memorable journey home, and now he was

very sick and literally at her mercy. As she thought of it, to betray him seemed treachery. She could not reason fairly what course to pursue.

More and more angrily she told herself that it served her right for going around visiting sick and unknown persons; and more and more hotly she blamed herself for her present awkward fix. And she had promised to pray for this outlaw! And he had audaciously advised her to pray for the Sheriff of Wasco instead! That meant, of course, that the Sheriff would be shot at the first opportunity. If she let Hardeman get away she would be directly responsible for a murder.

She thought and thought; but the more she thought the deeper became her conviction that duty to others compelled her to ignore her own feelings and her rash promise, and to have Hardeman held. She cried over it till her eyes were red, and finally in despair decided that she would make a clean breast of it to her father.

Mr. Thorn noticed at supper that his daughter was in a very depressed state, but he attributed it to her tender heart, and her worry over the poor injured woodman.

After supper, however, she came to him as he sat on the doorstep, watching the play of colors on the distant peaks, and stealing her hand into his sat down by his side.

"What's doing now, Myra?" queried the wise gentleman. "How much is it this time?"

"Nothing—I'm in need of advice, dad—that's all."

"Advice? All right, daughter. Go ahead."

"I've got a secret," whispered Myra. "Father, is a woman's promise made in haste to be lived up to?" she asked solicitously.

"That depends," said Mr. Thorn judicially. "Anyone been proposin' to you, Myra?"

"Oh hush, father. No, indeed. A man's in trouble and I promised not to reveal his identity. And I should do so. I'm dreadfully worried about it."

"You reveal, and reveal quick, daughter," said Mr. Thorn. "What is it?"

"The man who is injured at the camp is posing as the Sheriff of Wasco."

"You don't say! And he isn't? You recognize him?"

"Yes, father, he's no sheriff. He wants to get away easily—and I promised not to tell."

"Who is he, daughter?"

"He's Hardeman."

Mr. John Thorn bounded to his feet in an instant.

"Hardeman? and pretending he's the Sheriff? Eh?"

"Yes, the men think he's the Sheriff; and he's only waiting to get strong and escape."

Mr. Thorn took his daughter's hand in his and drew her to him. "Promises are dangerous matters, Myra. You have done the right thing in telling me. How was the rascal? Was he decent?"

"Oh, yes! he was glad to see me," she said eagerly, "and he seemed to want to do better. Maybe we'd better keep quiet, father. He was showing his good side, that side that makes him so different from an outlaw."

"By Christopher! Why, he was fooling you, Myra. Leave him to me," said her father brusquely.

She seized his arm and looked at him entreatingly. "Remember he did not harm me, father. —*Remember.*"

John Thorn ground his teeth. "Yes, I'll remember. He won't pay for that offense; I'll give the devil his due. But he'll hang all the same. It's my paramount duty to go and see Butts this instant."

The stage was rumbling in the distance and Mr. Thorn caught it with difficulty. But once inside he ensconced himself in the furthest corner, cogitating excitedly over the tremendous sensation he was about to spring on the unsuspecting camp.

When he arrived there, puffing and blowing, he took Butts aside and whispered to him that the sick man was a fraud and a villain.

The captain, who knew of Myra's visit, understood in a moment. Listening gravely he suggested that Mr. Thorn take a look at the man in the hospital.

"If he ain't the Sheriff of Wasco, but that man Hardeman, we'll have to treat him according to what he is—seeing as how he has fooled us," said Butts.

So while Mr. Thorn strutted off to interview the impostor, the captain collected the men and imparted to them that the Sheriff of Wasco, having evidently failed to clear his identity to Miss Thorn, was about to be exposed by her father.

They all grinned at the prospect of a splendid entertainment.

"And if he sticks to his outlaw story with the old gent, then let's make him sorry," suggested Mr. Jenks gleefully. "We'll treat him like an outlaw, you bet. And we won't let the old man know he ain't, neither."

To this they assented cordially. It was just what they needed to make variety. They would treat the Sheriff outrageously and make Mr. Thorn responsible. The Sheriff was well enough now to stand a joke or two. Well, they would

just see how long he could be made to tolerate one.

Mr. Thorn entered the cabin hospital and looked at the Sheriff carefully by the light of the lantern on the table. This outlaw was surely a big handsome fellow enough. That did not signify, of course, but it was slightly embarrassing.

"Well, I came to see you," exclaimed the visitor suddenly, panting for breath.

"Charmed, I am sure," and the Sheriff extended his hand. "But what do you call yourself?"

"Never you mind who I am," retorted the worried gentleman, ignoring the proffered hand. "I am here to identify you, sir. You're a fraud."

The Sheriff of Wasco sat up on an elbow and rolled a cigarette. "Would you call me a fraud if I were quite recovered?" he drawled. And he looked searchingly at Mr. Thorn, his eyes seeming to pierce that gentleman through and through, while the lines on his face hardened perceptibly.

Myra's father faltered. Then he remembered the righteousness of his cause and blurted out.

"You're living here under false pretenses, sir. You're not the Sheriff of Wasco."

"Why, you seem to be stirred by some sort of a deep, playful emotion, Mr. Stranger. Take a seat," said the invalid.

Mr. Thorn was glad to sit down. Being somewhat cooled off by his reception he scarcely knew what to say next. Outside in the darkening vista of the door he perceived dim forms and knew that the men were listening.

"——Seems to me you're a comedian," remarked the invalid slowly.

The visitor gasped in chagrin and anger. "And *you're* Hardeman the outlaw," he spluttered.

In an instant the Sheriff realized that this fat and hearty old gentleman before him must be the father of the girl he had saved. Miss Myra Thorn had grown tired of praying for the outlaw, and had told her father all about it. To deny now that he was Hardeman would be extremely embarrassing and might lead to questions of why and wherefore, which the Sheriff had no intention of discussing—least of all with the girl's father. If the patrolmen had decided that love was the cause of his reticence, how would the matter appear to astute Mr. John Thorn?

He sank down into his bunk and thought hard for a moment or two.

"You're evidently the lady's governor. Well, you'd better string me up quick, sir."

"*You're* Hardeman? You dare confess it," gasped the old man triumphantly.

"Sure as you're John Thorn, the corpulent millionaire."

The visitor shifted uneasily and eyed the sick one with momentary suspicion ere he launched forth pompously.

"It's my duty, sir, to give you up to these men. While I fully appreciate that you brought my daughter back safely, you are still at heart a demon. A demon, sir, and you are wanted for so many crimes that to keep your identity secret, and share in your contemplated escape, would be criminal."

The Sheriff turned towards the speaker and looked at him in undisguised admiration.

"Say, if I could talk like that I'd quit being an outlaw. I'd start in to be a bunco steerer."

Stout John Thorn twitched. This nonchalant young reprobate was altogether too lively. Rising, he beckoned to the men outside and called them in.

"This man acknowledges he is the outlaw Hardeman, and not the Sheriff of Wasco," said Mr. Thorn.

Butts started backward in feigned surprise, and the ring of confederates standing round growled in what appeared to be the deepest amazement. Then the leader advanced to the bunk and bent a ferocious glare on the defenceless Sheriff.

“Which is it, young feller?” he demanded.
“Out with it. Give it to us straight.”

The Sheriff knew instinctively that some scheme was afoot, but he remained silent.

“Which?” demanded several of the men.
“Which are you?”

The Sheriff glared at them searchingly, but he saw no sign of fun. Then with a sarcastic twist of his upper lip he answered:

“You genteel group of children, I’m the outlaw Hardeman, of course.”

The captain rose to his duty. He issued a harsh, reverberating command, and two men stepped forward and bound the Sheriff’s legs in silence. Then he walked away with Mr. John Thorn, promising loudly that the villain should be given over to the proper authorities without delay.

So Myra’s father went back to Hilltown, feeling that his duty as a citizen had been done; and the moment he was gone the plotters collected outside the cabin door and inquired feelingly of the prisoner how he enjoyed being Hardeman now.

The outraged Sheriff answered never a word, but ground his teeth in silence, while he meditated revenge? Mr. Jenks dropped into the cabin and sitting beside him, asked sympathetically if he could do anything to alleviate his

inner thoughts. And then Butts returned and announced that inasmuch as the invalid persisted in being Hardeman, his diet would hereafter consist of water and bread and no cigarettes.

He stooped towards the table to remove the tobacco as he made the remark, and like a flash the Sheriff whirled towards him and seized him by his collar. The same instant he drew his heavy revolver from under his pillow and presented it at Butts' astonished face.

"Look a-here," said the slow, melodious voice of the Sheriff, "I'm good-natured enough—but I have fits of excitement once in a while. I feel one a coming now."

Butts struggled earnestly to get away. "Sheriff, it's only a joke," he protested smiling. "We boys thought we'd enjoy ourselves a bit."

"So you will, all right," echoed the Sheriff. "Now, boys, remember I said I was to be Hardeman to that young lady. That means to her father too. It's just my own personal desire and it's none of your blamed business. Savvy?" he inquired sweetly.

Everybody echoed: "Sure!" and the speaker released Butts, who backed away to the wall.

"Now that we quite understand each other," continued the Sheriff of Wasco, "and just to

show that I fully appreciate your kind treatment of me, I'm going to celebrate."

Bang—bang, went the heavy revolver, and chips flew from the log wall on either side of the captain's head. Bang—bang, and one bullet grazed his shoulder and the other pierced the side of his coat. Bang, and the dilapidated water-pitcher on the shelf flew to pieces. Butts and the boys, emitting discordant and unearthly yells, disappeared in a wild scramble. The Sheriff fired his last shot through the looking glass on the wall, and then turning over pulled the blanket around him, smiling to himself.

Without, the patrolmen gathered around their leader, whooping in glee as he gingerly inspected his damaged coat. The captain looked foolish for a moment; then he turned to Yang Foo, who came trotting in haste from the kitchen, and bel-
lowed:

"Give that wild coyote in there anything he wants—whiskey or milk. He's sure gone rampaginous."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REVELATION.

So the dangerous outlaw Hardeman having been safely arrested, Mr. Thorn, who had not been a spectator at the later half of the performance, went home and told his daughter all about it.

“You’ve done your duty to the State, Myra. Don’t give yourself any regrets about it. Why the rascal declared he was just as surely Hardeman as I was *a corpulent millionaire*. Right to my face. Call him penitent?”

Myra smiled at her outraged parent; but inwardly she was uneasy. She was dissatisfied with herself. Her heart misgave her lest after all she had been too hasty, yet she could find no foundation for this feeling except an unconfessed liking, utterly and painfully out of place in the case. There were moments on that journey home when she had thought extremely well of her outlaw—who had fought for her and guarded her, and had seemed sometimes, enigma

that he was, to be even better than other men. Two weeks of reflection and cool judgment, even his wild iniquitous outburst of yesterday, had failed to dim that impression or render his memory less romantic.

After a week of waiting, in which she had hoped in vain for some news from the camp, she went up there one afternoon determined to learn all the details for herself.

She got her information before she reached the camp. For seated on a log at a turn of the trail, his back towards her, was Commander Butts, and with him was the man whom Butts had solemnly arrested a full week before at the request of her innocent father.

As Myra stood there petrified, but dimly divining by the memory of certain shadowy and nameless suspicions the meaning of this sight, she heard Butts say persuasively:

“Sheriff, don’t you do it. Don’t you be in too big a hurry goin’ after that skunk Hardeman. Give your wound another week. Ain’t you got a piece o’ business to look after here in Hilltown first, anyway?”

Spellbound by sudden conviction, Myra waited for that other voice.

“No, I must get Hardeman first. I’ve made a blamed fool of myself, Butts. I wish to thunder I’d never——Doggone it, kick me, won’t you?”

Butts affectionately thumped the buckskin-clad shoulder.

"I'd kick you clear back to Wasco, Sheriff, if 'twould help you," he laughed. "'Twould sure help my feelin's about the way you've conducted that there business. Want to hear a friend's advice?"

"What's the use?"

"Go right down and see her and have it out with her. Maybe she'll forgive you."

It was a thoroughly enlightened and wrathful Myra now. And it was certainly a most unlucky Sheriff.

"Great guns, man! She'd be madder than a wet hen," he exploded.

"Oh! Oh!—how dare you?" gasped Myra. The heads of the two conspirators slewed round together as though they were loose, and the grin of appreciation literally froze on Butts' face at what he saw behind him.

But that apparition's flashing eyes and crimsoned cheeks were not for him. but for his dumb companion.

"So you— *you are the Sheriff of Wasco,*" she said in a hushed, soft, utterly withering sort of voice.

They could no more affirm the fact than they could deny it, and their very humiliation helped

the girl. She seemed to tower above their convicted ague-stricken backs.

"I'm so glad to know," she said, growing collected. "As you may remember I rather admired the Sheriff, and this meeting is a great pleasure. I mustn't tell you how great a pleasure—because I remember—I remember my debt to you for bringing me back." Her voice told the pleasure exactly if he needed any enlightenment. "I know you're a brave man; I've had proof of it," she said. "But does a brave man usually take advantage of a terrified girl's mistake to make her a laughing-stock in her own eyes—and afterwards before his friends?" The scorn of her voice broke in a slight tremor as she thought of his outrageous "wet hen" simile.

The Sheriff had risen and stood beside Butts, his pale cheeks flaming. His eyes rested, ashamed but steady, on the girl's.

"Miss Thorn, don't be too hard on him," pleaded the friendly captain.

"You," breathed Myra, "you arrested him, didn't you?" and Butts collapsed.

Her accusing gaze returned to the Sheriff.

"*He* wore a mask.—I was a dunce of course not to see the difference. But there are strong points of resemblance between you. I think so still," she said slowly and with bitter meaning.

"I think now there must be other resemblances which I did not suspect then."

The Sheriff awoke to life. "You're right, ma'am. I haven't a word of excuse," he admitted.

The sparkling blue eyes of his judge wavered. She knew how unjust that last stroke of hers was. "But why did you do it?" she cried, a hurt sound of entreaty creeping in with the indignation of her voice.

"I didn't know you," he answered.

They were speaking to each other alone. Butts might have been a thousand miles away, as he devoutly wished himself. Once again Myra's eyes travelled stormily from the luckless Sheriff's face to his feet and back, then they changed.

"And those reforms of yours," she cried bitterly. Then grief and humiliation swept away half her anger. "Oh—how could you? I thought so well of you. I might have forgiven you if it weren't for that." With a face almost as miserable as his own she turned and walked swiftly away as she had come.

The Sheriff of Wasco waited not to bid adieu to Butts. With determination on his brow he strode down the trail after the justly offended lady.

"Jumpin' crickets!" breathed the deserted

commander, looking round at the empty sunshine; then virtuously, "Well he'd oughter be ashamed of himself. Reforms, eh! After that look she gave him I've lost my sympathy for him." And Mr. Butts betook himself hastily elsewhere.

The Sheriff of Wasco at that moment was standing across the trail, facing a stately, implacable girl, unashamed of some defiant tears. War breathed between them. Too proudly humble to touch her hand he effectually barred her way, his arms folded, his pale face kindled with the light of passion.

"You cannot go like this," he said.

"Why cannot I?" she flashed; and he simply and tersely changed a word: "You shall not!"

Myra threw up her head, but he stood there, all stern and unabashed, a thunderstorm of love.

"Well?" she said, half quailing.

"You gave Hardeman his chance, Miss Thorn, or you believed you did. Be fair and give me mine—to win back your favor," he begged with masterful entreaty.

"Your chance—to laugh at me again? Thanks," she said cruelly, feline enjoying the knowledge that she could hurt him in return.

He put the mean little taunt aside.

"You know better than that." Then he was

suddenly all gentleness, while the force in him enfolded her despite her angry rebellion against him. "I can't stand having you mad with me. Now here's the truth, and it's been hurting me worse than it has you." He paused, while a tender, humorous gleam shot irresistibly from his eyes into her vexed ones. "Fact is I was a fool not to think of sending my card up that mesa ahead of me. 'Twould have saved me a heap of worry."

Myra's head jerked, but he saw the corners of her mouth soften for his very audacity.

"The result was, you took me for that low thief I'd come after. I didn't understand for a minute; and when I did, it struck my tom-fool sense of humor as a joke." He waited, but Myra would not appreciate. "'Course it wasn't," he blandly explained. "I ought to have told you I'd missed him by half an inch and was swearing mad until I found you, all white and huddled up and frightened, and staring at me as if I was going to eat you,—poor little lady."

Here memory gave the citadel of feminine wrath a sharp jolt. Myra's eyes were withdrawn. But she answered tartly: "Oh, you were kind enough. I ought to have known the difference, I'll admit."

"Well, I don't know. Don't you forget those strong points of resemblance between us."

The gentleness of the answer seemed merely wishful to help her out. But its quickness, and a certain faint note of reproach in it, set her ears tingling guiltily.

"I certainly ought to have told you who I was," he resumed remorsefully. "There's no sort of excuse for that oversight.—But you see how it was. I happened to discover what a heap you thought of the Sheriff of Wasco, and naturally I couldn't——"

Decidedly Myra's eyes came up this time. "I didn't," she gasped indignantly. Just as suddenly, however, they dropped again. "Why, you're even worse than I thought you were," she declared.

"Oh, pshaw—now I knew that all along," he drawled melodiously, smiling at her. "Couldn't be as good as that Sheriff of Wasco, nohow! Still I'm not so awful bad when I'm good. When I'm bad I ain't real noticeably good, naturally. That's human."

Was the audacious creature laughing at her? Myra's eyes flashed. He was grinning openly. She would have passed him, only that he still blocked the way.

"That's no argument for a grown man. From what I know of you I should say your bad streak was uppermost usually," she stormed with an awful falling from dignity. "You're taking a

mean advantage now. Let me pass. I'm—I'm afraid of you, sir."

He slouched gracefully forward with a certain earnestness.

"You afraid o' me?—You? Why that's surely a little girl's way of teasing a man. Afraid of *me*? Do you remember the mesa, and when I brought you home—the day and the night? Do you remember when you slept, and I watched you? Why you weren't even afraid of him you thought Hardeman, and certain sure you're not afraid of me." His voice at first had been anxious and uncertain, but he saw the corners of her mouth smile. He whispered confidently. "That's a bluff—a great big bluff of yours, isn't it?" and then he laughed—a low, deep, musical laugh, but so infectious that Myra's smile broadened resistlessly. "Say,—truly, didn't I make a bird of an outlaw?" he inquired joyously.

"I most got twisted sometimes. Didn't know I could be so good," he declared. "When I saw you asleep—" he hesitated, but Myra's expression was certainly not forbidding, at least,— "when I saw you asleep, your face all red and white, and you so tired, lying there with your head on my coat, I most wished I was that outlaw, by heavens. I wanted to run off with you myself. But no! I was so doggoned good I watched you five mortal hours, afraid to cough or

get a drink of water lest you'd awake. Say—you *will* take that back, Miss Thorn. You're not really afraid of me, are you?"

It was an unexpected and lovable display of the youth's uncertainty and humility in the man, and Myra fell deeply in love with it.

"Sheriff, I think you're just the worst rascal I ever met," she said, and smiling laid her hand in his.

His closed swiftly on it, and there was a moment when he almost said certain things which he had forbidden himself. The next, he remembered he was but a sheriff, with his six hundred a year to her many thousands, and his absurd tin cup was in the spring nearby, and in his eyes was only a smiling, careless dare-devil.

"Have a drink—have one on me," he said, passing it to her.—"I'd hate like thunder to have lost your friendship by that darn foolishness."

She drank, her eyes smiling at him across the brim and full of promises which he did not see, being blinded by too much looking on his poverty.

CHAPTER XV.

A VISIT TO HILLTOWN.

As the days passed the patrolmen noticed that the Sheriff improved in health, and they also noticed that he was high-strung and anxious. They rightly attributed it to an intense desire to be on the trail again, to be out hunting his quarry—to do things—and they sympathized with him. Occasionally, however, they caught him in unfriendly mood, sitting on a fallen tree, or walking sullenly alone; then they smiled furtively at one another, and proceeded to draw other conclusions quite as correct.

“Serve him plumb right gettin’ all shook up in a love affair he ain’t got sense nor gall enough to put through. Serve him plumb right for playin’ off to a grateful lady as that low wolf Hardeman. Did anybody ever hear of a young feller like him missin’ such a chance?—A millionaire’s daughter, too! Yah—Plumb disgustin’!”

This was from Mr. Jenks of Oregon, in his anxiety for his oracle. But afterwards the circle would reconsider and hand it down as their

judgment that the Sheriff had done just the white thing, and in their extreme friendliness would openly give him advice as to how to proceed.

The Sheriff always resented their impertinent suggestions.

Seeing at last it was no use baiting him, the men got together and made a pool as to the date and the time of day when the Sheriff would go and say good-bye to Miss Thorn. They were unanimously of the opinion that he would have to make a final visit at least to square himself. There was absolutely no way out of that, and they might just as well bet on the time as not; so every man contributed two dollars to the pot. There was something like fifty dollars to win. They watched the Sheriff's movements closely, and every time that he started out of camp they took the time. Somebody was going to win two months' salary, and so, many of those who should have been sleeping stayed awake half the night, watching to see whether the Sheriff would make an early start for Hilltown. The camp began to get nervous, and the Sheriff of Wasco remarked to Butts one evening that the men seemed to be "all-fired nighthawks!"

"Tell you how it is, Sheriff," was the captain's answer, "the men are all so worried about your goin' after that there outlaw that they

can't sleep. Their natures air so highstrung that they hate to see a friend take chances."

The Sheriff of Wasco grinned.

"Well," he answered, "I've got to go soon, Butts. But before I go I'm going to Hilltown to see the Thorns."

Butts' heart gave a great bound. "When yer goin' to start, Sheriff?" he asked, the words almost choking him in his anxiety.

"To-morrow at eight," was the indifferent answer,—“good night.”

As the Sheriff walked away to his bunk the captain's brain grew active. He kept his information to himself and craftily began to suggest to the boys that they ought to raise the ante. What was the use of having a pot with only fifty dollars in it? The time was approaching rapidly when the Sheriff must make that visit. He surely must go within a week. Why not make the excitement greater?

So every man put his second two dollars into the pot, and his new guess on a piece of paper and dropped it into a tin can. Butts lay awake all night.

The Sheriff started promptly at eight fifteen next morning, for Hilltown. "To buy a few cartridges," as he expressed it. He was scarcely out of sight when the men in camp made a wild swoop onto the tin can. There were some pretty

close guesses, but Butts won. He had one guess "8.04 A.M." with the correct date.

Everyone felt cheap and disgusted, except Butts, who pocketed the coin, and, announcing that he would be back in a week, started as soon he could for Seattle.

The men thought it over for about an hour, and then they began to expectorate more frequently than usual, and to hitch up their trousers occasionally, and say, "damn" to themselves.

Finally Jenks mustered courage.

"Seems to me," he muttered, "Seems to me, boys."

"Yes," retorted another, "—that's what! We've been buncoed.—Done up."

"We'll lay for Butts, we will," they chorused, "and we'll cowhide him."

"Naw you won't," exhorted Jones, "Butts' just got it out o' that Sheriff; he wormed it out, and we is to blame for being fools to guess again. You can't prove anything agin Butts. He had two guesses; you don't know which one be put in last—the wrong or the kerrect. Butts is all right. He's got the brains. We is the suckers."

They were a disgusted lot. But presently as they discussed the matter they were thunder-struck to see Butts returning to camp. He came towards them and sat dejectedly down on a stump.

Jenks moved forward. "That was a blamed good guess o' yourn, Cap," he exclaimed; "Have you come back here to make good?"

Butts shook his head slowly. "Nothing doing, boys," he muttered; "nothing doing. I do sorter acknowledge I took a mean advantage. I worried it outer the Sheriff. That was fair enough though—you all had the same chance—but I've lost the dough."

"How?" chorused the men as they gathered around. "How did you lose a hundred ker-plunks?"

"Well, I'll tell you," and the Captain began slowly. "I got a mile out there on the road when a feller pulls a gun on me, and laughs and says,

"Yer a darned smart fox, Butts—but you're wrong. Fork over those hundred dollars you got by gittin' the inside track. It's mine by rights. I set the time. *I win.*"

"The Sheriff o' Wasco?"

"Sure it was. And he reaches down and per-lutely takes the hundred outer my pockets; and then he says: "Go back, friend Butts, and tell the boys to await my return; and tell 'em next time they make a pool on when a fellow's goin' to see a lady, not to get so doggoned sleepless about it. That gives 'em away."

They took Butts and carried him to the cabin.

Then they sat around the tables, drank whiskey and looked sheepish and cursed the Sheriff of Wasco. But finally they began to laugh and grow gleeful, and smash things in their unbounded admiration of him; and it ended with a glorious racket.

The Sheriff meanwhile had arrived in sight of Hilltown, his pockets heavy with money and his face abeam.

He grinned to himself as he thought of the disconsolate Butts and of the spree that was to have been in Seattle. Then he began to look serious. What would the boys do to him when he returned to the camp? How would they take the joke?"

He sat down on a fallen stump by the roadside and laughed aloud. He must certainly spend that money, every cent, before he got back; otherwise they would take it from him and it wouldn't do anybody any good.

He glanced through the trees and saw that only a half mile below, lower on the foothills, was Hilltown, quiet and nestling, surrounded by cleared fields, and profusely adorned with flowers. Children were playing in the distance, and men and women walking about. A restful scene, and it soothed the Sheriff curiously as he sat watching it. Then he looked at the towering Olympics, with the Devil's Pass in the distance,

the gigantic boulders and serried peaks cutting clearly into the sky, wrapt here and there with mist and fleeting clouds—and the restful feeling vanished.

He shook himself and instinctively clutched his rifle.

“He’s not gone eastward. He’s out in the mines, with that gang there. “I’ll wager I’ll find him out there beyond the tail of the mountains near the ocean.”

A deep shadow crossed his face. His jaws settled firmly together, and the pleasant vision of Hilltown faded from his eyes. He saw a certain morning down in Wasco, the deed of horror there which had sent him forth on this quest for vengeance, the cheering boys as they bade him good-bye.

He saw the long tramp through the Devil’s Pass—alone one way—and the return journey in company dangerous but all too dear to memory. His thoughts slipped away to her! How angry she had been with him the other day; but afterwards, in her forgiveness, how sweet and womanly—how altogether desirable. He stood up suddenly and stepped out on the trail again.

“It’s time to say good-bye,” he muttered gruffly. “Got to do it. I haven’t any real right to sit in a love game with her. Not me. I’m

strong now, and my game is outlaws and such trash."

Gloomily he plunged along but suddenly halted at the distant voices of children.

"Kids," he muttered, as he swung along again, and soon beheld a boy and girl and a go-cart. The latter was made of a couple of boards with barrel heads for wheels, and had evidently come to grief on a stone in the road. The seven-year old boy was trying to hammer a wheel into position with a piece of wood, and the girl was telling him he was wrong—entirely wrong. He ought to use a piece of stone.

The Sheriff watched them a moment, then he coughed. "Hello, kids," he said, smiling, "can't you get that wheel a revolutin' right?" The children glanced at him, and the girl shielded herself behind her brother in alarm. The boy breasted the stranger bravely and demanded:

"Who's you?"

The Sheriff of Wasco stepped back. "Who's me?" he repeated, "Who's me? Oh, yes, I forgot—I'm a stranger. I don't know exactly where I am; I want to see Mr. Thorn in Hilltown."

The children saw the smile on the Sheriff's face and felt reassured.

"If you's bad the Sheriff of Wasco'll get you," exclaimed the boy. The Sheriff laughed melodiously. "Oh, dear me, kids, that Sheriff of

Wasco won't let any bad man come around you. Now you just let me fix that there wheel."

He stooped and turning the go-cart upside down knelt by it and pounded the wheel on the axle with his bronzed fist. Then he got a small twig and shaped it into a pin and stuck it in place.

"How's that?" he exclaimed, looking approvingly at his work.

The little girl edged sideways towards this agreeable stranger and pulling him by the sleeve said with smiling, upturned eyes: "Give us a ride—will yer?"

The Sheriff of Wasco looked at her a moment, then lifting her gently placed her on the mended go-cart; and, as the boy crawled on behind, the man-hunter seized the shaft and trundled the pair along the road. He glanced back once or twice laughingly:

"Remember, show me where Mr. Thorn lives, will you?" he asked of his juvenile companions.

"Sure," responded the girl, "He lives right next to our house. Go faster, please, Mister Stranger." So the Sheriff of Wasco, Winchester in hand, bent to his task and dragging the two in the go-cart he made his entry into Hilltown.

The town noticed the handsome stranger and his unusual occupation and surmised instantly

that he was the much-talked-of Sheriff at Butts' camp, for since Myra's discovery there had been no occasion to conceal his identity. The man was too intent on his work to see that he was the centre of attraction; and stopping suddenly at a command from the little girl before a large log cabin, he turned to his young friends.

"There now, kids, how was it? Here you are home."

They alighted, and he helped take the go-cart into the yard. Then the little girl pulled him by the sleeve.

"Come along now," she lisped, "We'll take you to see Myra—that's Miss Thorn."

And led by the two the big young Westerner walked next door to the Thorns' spacious cabin, and knocked; and Hilltown was ablaze with suppressed excitement.

Mr. Thorn himself answered the knock, and the two guides left the Sheriff to his fate.

It threatened to be a harsh one at first. For face to face with Myra's father the Sheriff, suddenly remembering their last interview, felt wholesome shame at himself, and stood hesitating, and growing red. "You see how it is," he plunged quickly, "I came to see you, sir, to talk about that gold mine out in the mountains, that you're interested in."

"Humph!" stout Mr. Thorn grunted; but

his eyes twinkled fast and his face shone with repressed pleasure as he showed the tall fellow to a chair on the veranda and sat down himself. This man had made Mr. Thorn look like a fool, but he had also brought back Mr. Thorn's daughter, and the old man had no score against him.

"Seems to me," he remarked, passing the visitor a cigar, "now I see you in daylight, you look more like a sheriff than an outlaw after all."

The Sheriff grinned his appreciation. "That was a darn fool thing for me to do—now wasn't it? I 'most died when Miss Myra gave me a laying out t'other day. And say—Butts, he had a silent fit."

Mr. Thorn bit his lip. "You needed all you got, Sheriff, and I'll have to get square with you myself. You take altogether too much delight in calling people corpulent millionaires," he said seriously.

The Sheriff of Wasco colored and gripped his knees with his hands; then he laughed:

"If I was a millionaire," he answered, "I wouldn't care what a sick man called me by mistake. I'd say he was too sick to be thoughtful. Anyhow, I'd forgive him sure——"

Mr. Thorn mentally forgave him then and there, but he did not say so. Instead he in-

quired what the Sheriff wanted to know about his gold mine.

"It's this way, sir. I've heard you and Miss Thorn are going out there soon. Now, I'd like it if you wouldn't."

"You'd like it if I wouldn't," gasped the astonished host. "Why? What's up?"

"Just this," the blue-gray eyes took on their most reserved expression, "I'm going there myself. I believe the outlaw Hardeman is there from certain reasons I've figured out. I'm going to get him and bring him back if he is. And if he won't come, you see, there's going to be a fight."

"Dear me," said Mr. Thorn, greatly disturbed, "and we have arranged to go this week. And my daughter—well, I'm afraid she won't take 'no' for an answer, unless I tell her the facts. And that won't do at all, Sheriff. She's too frightened already of that outlaw."

The Sheriff shook his head decidedly. "Don't tell her, sir. I go to-morrow to find Talabam the Indian Chief. He will show me the old trail across the mountains to the mines. Give me a few days' start, and then you can follow, and put up at some place this side of the mines till you hear from me."

"Good idea. There's Jones' cabin, ten miles this side. We'll stop there," said Mr. Thorn,

relieved. "I'll make some excuse and we'll stay till we hear from you."

"From me—or of me. Stay till it's settled," suggested the Sheriff smoothly; and a new idea suddenly struck the old gentleman. He had forgotten the danger of the mission.

"You're taking help along, Sheriff," he queried earnestly.

The tall young Sheriff looked insulted. "To get one man, sir?" he asked quietly.

"Well, but they're not a nice set out there, boy. You'd better take a few of the patrol."

The Sheriff smiled grimly. "That would mean a great big free fight, sir, and a red sky. The boys are liable to get sorter excited. If I need help there's Chief Talabam."

"But you two won't tackle that gang alone, will you?"

"Darn the gang—I'm after Hardeman," was the laconic answer, and the older man was silenced. Privately he hoped that the Sheriff's theory was wrong. There was still the chance that the outlaw had betaken himself to safer places.

They smoked a while longer, talking of many things—of outlaws, of mines, of men, and of money making: The Sheriff had certain reserved virile ideas of his own concerning them, especially the last, as his hearer discovered with

secret approval. Mr. Thorn decided that he liked this tall, lean, rather reticent fellow, whose strength and candor and unconscious courage showed in speech and manner, and were written captivatingly all over him when he was silent. The Sheriff of Wasco was a gentleman of the wild country, a man among the finest, yet at the same time full of undaunted, open-hearted youth. Could a father forget how his daughter had been rescued and escorted back to safety by this knight of the new lands? Was it not natural that the heart of the elder should open to him.

So when the Sheriff stood up to go, there was a twinkle in Mr. John Thorn's eye. "Anything else, Sheriff?" he asked. "Anything else you'd like to see about?"

The Sheriff leaned against the post of the veranda and turned red. He seized his rifle and swung it under his arm, then he smiled doubtfully.

"Well, seeing as how if I catch Hardeman, I'll take him back quick, and I might not be around here in the next twenty years—it seems to me I'd just like to say good-bye to your daughter, Mr. Thorn; I would."

Mr. Thorn chuckled to himself over the bashful deliberateness of the speech.

"And seeing that you might have to fight it

out with the outlaw, and that's dangerous—and seeing how long twenty years is, and the debt of gratitude I owe you—you can see her, Sheriff. I'm going into town now. Good-bye. And see here, you just run up to Seattle some day and drop in on me. Old friends, you know.”

Smiling he ushered his guest into the cabin and calling for Myra to come down and see a friend, he deliberately took his hat and walked towards the post office.

“I like that Sheriff—he's no dude,” he muttered thoughtfully. “Hanged if I don't like him,” and his eyes twinkled deeply.

Myra did not at once appear, and the Sheriff sat alone, waiting, noting the many signs of refinement and wealth somehow stamped insidiously upon the place, though it was but a cabin a little larger and finer than its neighbors in Hilltown. He felt himself growing very remote. Plenty of money here, evidently. As he thought how much, he grew more and more dismayed; being certainly and genuinely in love, despite his independent philosophy.

“A measly sheriff with six hundred a year. I'm plumb locoed,” he reflected.

Then Myra appeared, and, despite the uselessness of it, his heart leaped to meet her.

She was not quite the girl he had known in their woodland experiences together; a faint

aroma of her wealth, of the environments of her home in the city, floated about her and removed her further from him. Yet she was all the same—and more; and despite his pride he found himself clinging jealously to the links between them. She might have been dressed in a cloud, so far as he knew, for as he took her hand his mind was on the day when she slept on the hillside and he had watched her bare arm in its ragged sleeve, and had fallen in love with it.

“I’ve come to say good-bye, Miss Thorn. I must go. I’ve got to go along after my business now I’m able.”

“Going away, Sheriff? Where to? Isn’t this the first time you’ve come to see me? I suppose”—she paused slightly,—“of course there’s somebody in Wasco can’t spare you any longer.” She smiled, but her chin rose coolly.

“Shucks!” he laughed uncertainly, “There ain’t anybody in Wasco, or anywhere else that I know of. You see—I came up here on special business, an’ I must be off.”

She sat down with a short gasp of fear. “Hardeman?” For a second or two she was his frightened mesa girl again. “Don’t go. It’s so dangerous. You may get shot.”

“That’s a fact, ma’am, I may. But I ain’t countin’ on it,” he answered dryly.

“I hate to think of your going, Sheriff,” she

whispered. "Give it up. I don't want to turn you from your duty, but I—that is, I mean *we* don't want to see you killed after all you've done for us." She was very much in earnest.

The Sheriff's face was a study. Give up Hardeman, remembering Jeff's wife down in Wasco? knowing, too, what this same girl whom he loved had escaped? But since her unreasonableness was all on his account, he was not going to spoil it.

"Yes, that Hardeman surely is a bad specimen; he 'most scares me," he assented in his gentle drawl. "But then I'm a dreadful dangerous man myself. I know a lady who won't walk with me 'cept she brings a gun along. That's a solemn fact," and the Sheriff smiled benignly.

"Don't be horrid," she said flushing up.

"Yes, ma'am. Had to give her my own pistol 'fore she'd come a step. She said I was enough like Hardeman to be his twin brother," he went on, mercilessly enjoying Myra's color.

"You're mean," she said, "and you're merely evading the present question." His banter ceased at once.

"I was flippant," he acknowledged. "That's not my real feeling, now I'm saying good-bye to you. There are a few things I'd like to say better than good-bye—but I guess about the only

square thing is this. Thank you for the pleasure I've had in knowing you, and in serving you a little. Don't you worry about my risk. 'Taint big enough to mention."

He stood waiting, his eyes regretful but full of a man's stern purpose. She threw back her head bravely and met his look with a smile.

"And so it's good-bye, Sheriff. That's too bad, isn't it? Do you know this is the first and only time you've come to see me? Do you know I'm going to think of you as Hardeman all the rest of my life—I know you so little as yourself?"

"My dern foolishness," he admitted sorrowfully, "I guess I'm going to be punished good an' plenty for it."

"Well, I don't know," she said judicially, "I rather think you deserve it. I'd like to have come to forget those things and think of you as my friend, the Sheriff of Wasco. But this is good-bye—so there's no chance of that."

He took a quick step forward, and the steady, eager question of his eyes forced hers to waver. "I guess you don't know what you're sayin'" he said softly, but he was so tall and so high above her that she neither looked up nor answered. "I'm the Sheriff o' Wasco, you see. Who's that? Just nobody—though I didn't think so always.
* * * I'm goin' on a long trail, and there ain't any outcroppings of gold on it as I can see."

His voice dropped to a doubtful whisper. "But I'd like to come back some day—God knows. "I'll make something o' myself yet. I'll go up north to the Yukon an' dig out one o' their gold mountains by the roots if—if——"

She turned away abruptly, and catching up a book from the table began to flit the leaves back and forth gaily, so he could not see her eyes.

"Gold?" she said smiling "—gold? What has that to do with our being acquainted in the future?" Then she flung down the book and faced him. "Oh, by the way, father and I are on the gold trail—did you know it? We're going out to see his mines this week."

If this was a hint of her father's wealth for his benefit, he lost it. Misunderstanding, he drew back sharply, proudly—and instantly began to speak about the mines. He was nothing more than her woodman escort, quick and gentle, but masterful—more masterful than ever in his embarrassment.

"The mines? They're no right place for a lady. Guess I wouldn't go there—not just at present."

"Mercy, why not?" she said, surprised and a little obstinate.

"Those miners are a lot of bad trash. I'd really like it if you'd keep away from there."

As always, without exerting himself at all, he produced in her the impulse to obey him.

"Do you know I'd really like it if you'd remember that this isn't Wasco, and that I'm not under your jurisdiction," she smiled rebelliously.

"I remember. I'm under yours," he corrected. "—But, honestly, you will keep away from those mines, won't you?"

Finally she dodged the question, "I'll take my orders from dad."

"Well, that's correct," he drawled, "your dad's all right." His point was gained. Swinging his rifle into the crook of his elbow, he stood hesitating, his eyes fixed searchingly upon her, his face growing determined.

"Were you bluffing me when you said you'd like to be better acquainted?" he asked doubtfully. "You see how it is, I ain't ever sat in a game with a lady—an' I don't exactly read the cyards."

She laughed sweetly but teasingly, and beyond that would not answer him. So he studied her face harder than ever, and perhaps read there the sign that he needed, for catching up her hand suddenly he showered a storm of quick, fiery kisses upon it.

"So long!" he whispered ardently, "I'll be back. If I live, I'll be back." He took his cap and cocked it on the back of his head and went

slowly out of the door, leaving her there smiling.

He grinned hopefully as he plunged along, musing to himself, "She wasn't bluffin'. No—not altogether. She likes me, I guess. I'll get her—I'll *get* her if I have to walk to the Klondike an' back."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHERIFF AND TALABAM.

A PREY to his own thoughts and quite oblivious to his surroundings, the Sheriff had gone a long way from Hilltown when he suddenly remembered something, and began to laugh to himself.

"By George—there's that hundred dollars! I hav'n't any particular desire to take it back to camp. I clean forgot about it."

He mused awhile, then hurriedly retraced his steps to a store that he had noticed as he passed. "What you got for house-furnishings here?" he asked quizzically.

"Oh, anything from a sardine can to a grizzly hide," retorted the merchant.

"What did you say about grizzlies? Let's see 'em."

"I've got the goldarnedest hide of a grizzly you ever saw, stranger. 'Twould make a carpet for a king's parlor—it's worth a clean hundred."

"That's my size," said the Sheriff instantly. "Let's see the mammoth."

A great black-brown shaggy mass, prepared

with the skill of the expert for use as a rug, was unrolled. One glance was enough. "I'll take it," said the Sheriff, "Here's your hundred. And send it Mr. John Thorn, with the compliments of the patrol gang at the camp, in honor of the safe return of the finest young lady in the Olympics to her father. And say, look-a-here—if you squeal and tell who bought it, I'll come around and see you."

The merchant grinned. "I'll deliver it personal, Sheriff," he said. "You trust me; I've been where you are myself." He winked knowingly, but the Sheriff was already gone.

On the way back to camp the man from Oregon sat on a stump and chuckled.

"I'd just like to see Mr. John Thorn when he gets that carpet.—And she'll maybe think o' me now an' again when she happens to see that grizzly," he mused. "I wonder if she will. And I wonder what the boys will do when John Thorn goes and thanks 'em for their beautiful present, ha! ha! ha!"

He reached the camp and the patrolmen surrounded him. "Hand over the dough, Sheriff. Where's that hundred you got outer Butts?" they cried with various degrees of emotion.

"It's gone, boys," explained the reprobate of a Sheriff. "I spent it all. You wait and you'll know how. You see I'm going soon and I

thought a present wouldn't jar you too much—just to remember me by."

They were nonplussed, but they took it kindly, seeing that the Sheriff seemed so happy about it. Of course it was their money that had bought the present which was to be theirs—but that was all right. The joke was on them; and they celebrated the departure of the Sheriff of Wasco with vigor and the best of wishes. Butts told him where to look for Chief Talabam, also just to say that he was Butts' friend; and then the Sheriff shook hands all around and went out into the early morning on his dangerous mission.

The camp was electrified later in the forenoon to receive a visit from Mr. John Thorn.

"Say, boys," he said pantingly from atop his horse, "I just rode around to thank you for that elegant grizzly skin you sent me to commemorate my daughter's safe return. Say, it's the finest thing this side of the Rockies."

"What the —— is he talking about?" queried some of the men of Jenks. "We ain't sent no present."

"Hush you! That's the present the Sheriff o' Wasco was a talking about. He ain't sent anything to us, you fool; he's sent it to Mr. Thorn—that's same as to the girl, don't you see; and we, ha! ha! ha! we's paid for it."

Like a flash the men understood. But they were game to the core.

"Yes," remarked the captain in answer to Mr. Thorn, "we just thought as how that grizzly would be a suitable present for the occasion."

"It was more than suitable. It was the work of noble hearts, boys. It was a master-stroke. But good-bye all, I must get along."

"Good-bye, Mr. Thorn," echoed the patrol, "good-bye. Glad you like it. Just a little remembrance."

They watched him disappear in the distance; then Butts kicked a stone into the gully below, and Jenks threw a rock into the dinner stew on the kitchen fire.

"What do you think o' that?" roared he. "He sends a rug to Thorn and we pay for it."

"An' we get the credit for being kind-hearted gents, and have to labor under false pretences," cried another.

"An' the Sheriff o' Wasco gets us a thinking we're goin' to be the recipients of that there bootiful partin' present, bought outen our money."

"Didn't feel like spending it on himself. On his darlin' self," exclaimed Jenks disgustedly.

"'An the present was the work o' noble hearts. He's a noble heart—he is," echoed another.

"We're a lot o' mountain sheep—that's what," exclaimed Butts finally. "But let's have a few drinks to the young colt anyway."

Meanwhile the Sheriff of Wasco had left the shore road some half a dozen miles below, and was ascending into the uplands. All day and night he travelled along the rugged base of the mountain chain, and when the sun arose he was still making quick progress towards the north-west corner of the state.

He stopped for a rest and for breakfast at the base of a great rock overlooking the landscape for miles around.

He chose his camp carefully in a spot where he could see everything without being easily seen himself, and went about his preparations for breakfast with the quickness and certainty of a man inured to wilderness life. It was no time or place for the lighting of fires, so he munched his dried biscuit and drank his cold coffee supplied by the guardsmen, his rifle close by his side and his eyes carefully scanning the woodlands and valleys, the far-off peaks and their nearby breastworks rising ruggedly on all sides of him.

"Guess there isn't much danger. He's probably down at the mines. An' they're leagues away from here. Still he might just be prowling around hunting for bear, or out on a strike, in

which event 'twould be cussed foolish for me to give him another shot." The Sheriff's lower face settled into a disgusted twist as he remembered his last lapse of caution.

"If I follow this trail till night I'll find Chief Talabam and his Yakimas. The chief's a bird of a red skin, they say. And that reminds me—I wonder whatever became of that little Indian boy who used to chase father's chickens around the yard with me, and who fell into the Columbia river that day."

He ceased eating for a few moments to smile reminiscently over the memory. "That," he muttered, "that must 'a been twenty-two years ago when I was a little kid. The current took him down stream like a race horse—and I was streaking it along the bank giving him pointers how to keep from drowning, when he sank, and I—by thunder how did I do it anyway? And when he went away with his squaw mother she blessed me with her Injun's blessing and the little cuss said some day he would be Chief of the Thunder Mountains, and then he would find his pale-face brother.—Guess he'd scalp me by this time, soon as not," said the Sheriff with a philosophic grin.

He pushed back his shirt-sleeve and examined his wrist. "Got that tear in the rapids to remember him by. He was sorter cut up an'

smashed in his shoulder too. We were a couple of gay kids, if I recollect."

Breakfast over, the Sheriff bestowed his long body restfully, his visored cap wedged between the back of his head and the rock, his chest upturned to the blue heavens, and his knees crossed lazily and with apparent abandon, and his rifle reposing across his stomach beneath his folded arms. There he fell to ruminating on the extraordinary shrinkage which was apt to take place in a man's valuation of himself when perched on some wild mountain side like this, alone with a few of nature's big things, overlooking the hugeness of the earth that bore him.

All below him stretched miles upon miles of wooded hills, betraying no sign of the presence of man. Above him soared the majestic mountains surrounded by their native stillness and repose, with the vast spaces of earth and sky dividing them eternally.

How far away from this place seemed the busy world of men, how vain and unreal! And his own life with its small activities, its strenuous haste, how unimportant it was. Here Life itself, the ultimate *being*, the everlasting spirit behind the existence of material things, spoke to him and impressed him with a salutary vividness he had seldom before known. The silent greatness, the vastness, of space were here, and here was

also his lone, throbbing, human heart, all alike parts of the universal Life. How small and insignificant in the great scheme of things was a man! So small and insignificant that to realize it was to feel oppressed at the touch of an appalling loneliness and grandeur.

Yet, feeble and unimportant in comparison with the whole before him though he might be, there he was, breathing, feeling, vigorous in his day and generation, the conqueror of those mountain steeps, those huge impassive barriers of nature. Man might be little, but he was chief, the highest of Life's manifestations. It was his strength, his power, his ability to command the muscles of his body, which had brought him to this place where he stood, and would carry him when he chose across the most insurmountable of the peaks. His brain was the matchless engine that should subdue all the other forces of nature, and make him their king. This was life physical, and life supreme, life in its grandest sphere, its most heroic mold, life that gave dominance and power over all other things. It was inherent in man, and marked him for its highest and most god-like manifestation.

Presently the Sheriff's thoughts went further.

There were other things besides the life physical, the sovereign dominance over created things, which made man what he was.

He was looking now on another picture—on his life as an engineer down in Wasco, his prospects there, which had been rather good; on the call to be Sheriff—deep in his heart he was sternly proud of that; then on the wild scenes that had followed, poor Jeff's terrible, broken-hearted collapse, the finding of Hardeman's work of desolation. As always when he had these things in mind, a curious, brooding quiet stole over the Sheriff's face, his firm lower jaw set fiercely, and the nature of his thoughts showed in the stern gleam of his eyes. He would discharge his great responsibility. He would justify the confidence of those who had deemed him worthy for such a work of vengeance.—And after that?

After that he would begin again and build his future from the bottom up. His fortunes were just now at the vanishing point,—but what of it? He had no regrets. None—except for one thought, one dear warm thought deep down in his heart. A man must sacrifice himself to his duty sometimes; else he was no man.

Duty! What a queer, apparently insignificant word that was. Yet how it rang through a man's brain. *Duty!* As his mind heard it it seemed like the call of the ages carried across space to him, raising him immeasurably above that other man whom he had deemed supremé—

the physical. With it were blended in his fancy the despairing voices of a woman and a child—Jeff's wife and baby. What were his personal future, his life, his insignificant fortunes as compared with that cry? He was answering it. He, man, alone of all nature's works had the power to hear and answer that cry. Yes, the call of duty—that made life. It was greater than physical life. He had been wrong when he said that life physical was supreme, for now he knew that life lived for duty was greater, higher, and far more difficult. It was most worthy of a man.

And then presently across the kindling exaltation of his face there crept a deep tender glow, which passed to his strong hands and to his whole live, youthful body, and sent his heart bounding in great throbbing leaps. He was thinking of Myra as he had left her yesterday, thinking with the yearning desire for possession—of her soft, graceful presence, her smiles and sweet reservations that were promises, her clear round voice, and of the love that he knew was consuming him. He could not tell her of his passion, no, not now, not until his position was secure. He was no lowly adventurer to hunt a rich man's daughter, but a man genuinely in love, carried away by the very image of the woman he adored. He would not speak yet, he could not, lest suspicion, the vaguest suspicion

be cast on his sincerity. He was proud and a son of the open West, and he felt that, given half a chance, he would win out for love. He *would*, if he worked the flesh off his hands in doing so.

Yes, he was living, indeed. This was what it meant to be a man; to hear the voice of duty ringing its clarion notes before him, and in his every heartstring to feel the agonized cry of a man's great love; to do battle with the best that was in him for both. "Duty and love!" said the Sheriff of Wasco with muttered passion. "Give me the physical power, the fortune, to win out for duty. Then, by heavens, I'll tackle the love; and I feel that I'll win—I do."

He gazed awhile into the distant shining Pacific and across the straits to the land of the British, while the mountain breeze whipped the hair on his brow, and the sun beat hot on his brown, keen visage.

"Yes, I am living now, no mistake," he said softly to himself with a smile. "Now that I know her. I never lived before—never."

A wary mountain sparrow, deceived perhaps by his great stillness, alighted near him and proceeded to breakfast off the crumbs scattered about. The sparrow knew nothing of men, probably had never seen one before, but the man knew all about mountain sparrows, and knew

that so long as this one remained with him there could be no prowlers of any description in the vicinity. He was Sheriff still, as well as lover and philosopher, and he forgot not that once lately his enemy, whom he had supposed miles away, had shot him most unexpectedly.

"Little bird's hungry—but it's dollars to doughnuts he isn't half as hungry as I am. Anyway he's a good watch-dog."

The Sheriff closed one eye as an experiment, a few minutes later he closed the other without knowing it, and dozed in absolute contentment with the tiny mountain sparrow on guard.

Half an hour or so later, however, he opened his eyes suddenly to find that the little wild visitor was gone. Crumbs were still plentiful, so the Sheriff's sleepy expression vanished at once. Glancing inquiringly about, he noted a hawk, flying toward the lower valley, swerve sharply upward as it passed a little gorge just below him.

"Living something or other just down there, a heap too close for comfort, and I guess I'll start in an' classify him."

Silently hitching his rifle to its accustomed place, he melted away from the boulder. Like a shadow on the grass he crossed the open spaces toward the gorge and even in that clear moun-

tain air his footsteps left no sound, they were so light, so certain and swift.

Once at the crest of the gorge he perceived without difficulty the thing that had disturbed the wild denizens. A company of Indians were setting their tepees beside the small mountain stream in the valley.

"The Yakimas, by George," he thought at once, "that's lucky. I wonder which of them is Chief Talabam."

He watched them for a few moments longer to satisfy himself. He knew the tribe, the aristocrats of the far western red men, fearless, and independent, not yet living in the confinement of government reservations. With them the rifle had not fully replaced the bow and arrow, and the chase after the big game of the Olympics was still their chief means of livelihood.

The sheriff slung his rifle across his shoulder, and abandoning every appearance of concealment, made for the valley.

The red men perceived him instantly. Gravely and with feigned indifference to the coming of the solitary white hunter they watched his descent. It was easy now to distinguish the leader. The tallest of his band, he stood motionless, his erect, half-naked figure shining red brown in the sun, his plumed head tilted slightly backward, and his broad but clean cut face turned half in-

quisitively towards the stranger. His hands grasped a long bow, which was braced endwise against a tree trunk, and his whole bearing expressed the authority and half-tolerant insolence that befitted the great chief of the aristocratic Yakimas.

The Sheriff knew at a glance that he was entering into the midst of a tribal vanguard, and that these men were but the ground choosers for an encampment. The braves made not a sound or a movement as he stood before their chief, and, unslinging his rifle, threw it on the ground with an indifference that matched the red man's. The eyes of the Wasco man returned the chief look for look; then he offered the dignitary some tobacco, and spoke in the slow pleasant language of the Yakimas.

"The white friend looks for the big Chief, Talabam.—The Chief Butts of the White Walkers * sends the Yakimas the spirit of a great hunt."

The bronze figure listened with solemn attention to his own language from the lips of the white man; then it pleased him graciously to unbend and accept the tobacco, and the entire company seated themselves in a semi-circle and the high business of Indian speech-making began.

* The Indians referred to the patrol as the "White Walkers."

“The Chief Talabam is glad the Chief of the White Walkers remembers. The white brother comes when the heart of Chief Talabam is red with blood and anger, for the braves from the East whisper to him that the great white maiden of the settlements was stolen. The Yakimas know the white maiden, and the braves and the squaws and the papooses cry that she must come back. If Chief Butts sends to ask help of Talabam, his braves will go even into the Land of Silence. The land beyond will hear the war-cry of his tribe; for the white maiden must be saved.”

Indian fashion, he swung his right arm in a slow semi-circle towards San Juan straits, the outlying Pacific, and the great Olympics behind them

Knowing now that it was Talabam himself, a native famed throughout these vastnesses, who spoke, the Sheriff arose, and with the dignity of the white man prepared to soothe the fighting spirit of his red brother.

“Talabam, the great and the proud,” he began, his natural, pleasant, self-possessed drawl lending the high-sounding phrases melody.—“Talabam, whose deeds are talked of by white men throughout the settlements of the Thunder Mountains, is the friend of the stranger. The Chief needs not to lead his bands into the Silent Land; for the white maiden is safe. She was lib-

erated and now walks in the settlement. But the Chief Butts asks that Talabam himself give aid to the stranger; for the bad man Hardeman, he who stole the maiden, hides in the mines, or the forests, and the Chief Talabam alone knows the trails. The white stranger has vowed to hunt the bad man from land to land, and when he finds him the fight shall be his, for he has come many days from the rising sun and the banks of the great river where the salmon fish run thick in the water. The white stranger will find the bad man, and Talabam can help, but the fight shall belong to the man who comes from the land of Wasco."

As he ceased, the Sheriff's right arm made the proper declamatory sweep. Talabam's eyes, following it, lighted with a satisfied flash as they beheld the long white scar running almost round the wrist, showing vividly in the sunlight as the sleeve of the coat fell back.

"The great white traveler must rest," he said, rising again with dignity, "for Talabam has a story to tell to his braves. It is a story of the land of Oregon.

The Sheriff planted himself once more on the ground in forced patience, and the solemnity of the Chief's features seemed to break in a brief smile as he viewed the resigned face of the man who had come from the land of Wasco.

“As the light spreads over the land to the call of the sun, so spreads the fame of a great man. So come the echoes of the deeds of the white brother from Wasco who has traveled to the land of our tribe.

“The white brother tells us the maiden has returned, but he tells us not why or how. Talabam knows as he knows his right hand from his left that the bad man did not bring back the maiden. Talabam’s heart tells him that the stranger from Wasco saved the little white maiden, and like the great warrior, he is silent.”

The Sheriff started uneasily and waved a silencing hand at the Indian; but Talabam ignored him and continued:

“Braves of the Yakimas—your chief knows the white brother. Once when the chief was a youth and walked not far from his squaw mother, he made the bow and arrow and threw the stone, and swam the great river with a white boy in the land of Oregon.

“One day Talabam fell into the great Thunder Rapids, and sank and sank again. His eyes grew dim, and his breath came not for the waters. As he closed his eyes for the last sleep a white shadow sped by the banks; a voice came to him like the voice of the Spirit of Life, and Talabam heard a splash. When he woke to the land again, the white boy, wet and breathing blood from his

nose and mouth, was over him. The white boy's arm was torn, and hanging as a broken branch to the trunk. The sharp rocks of the rapids had cut in a circle above the hand.

"The white boy became a great man-hunter. They call him Sheriff of Wasco; and the little Indian boy whose name was Bam became the Chief Talabam.

"Warriors of the Yakimas, Talabam welcomes the white traveler, the little white devil boy, to his heart, and to the hearts of his tribe. He will go with him on the trail; for Talabam forgets not the Thunder rapids and the love of the two little braves in the land of Wasco."

The Sheriff was on his feet in an instant.

"Talabam—by Jove. I never guessed," he cried. He brought his hand down on the chief's shoulders and shook him vigorously, and turning him half round fairly shouted, "Darn you, old Bammy—darn you."

The chief side-stepped, and proudly addressed the encircling braves:

"He is the same as when ten summers only covered his head. He sings, as he sang then: "Darn you, Bammy,—darn you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MAN TO MAN.

TALABAM'S broad face was flecked with moisture and his breath came hard and fast, for the ascent of the heights had been a long day's journey, broken now and again by a rest of a few moments only. The sun shone mercilessly. The glare from the granite of the mountains flared against back and neck in a scorching blast, burning and cutting, blistering and torturing.

The wind from the Pacific, the Chinook, blew soft and warm, spreading the fog bank over the lands below; but above on the heights, the peaks were bare and sun-baked. The Indian looked down to the valley hidden by the fog, and his eyes closed in narrow slits. He turned to his companion, who, crawling around the face of a boulder, had thrown himself wearily into the shade.

"Wasco," he exclaimed in the white man's tongue. "The camp of the gold workers is not seen—the fog is there. But the new Boss is

the bad man from Oregon. Chidwan saw his face and he knows him. Chidwan lies not."

"Good for Chidwan," murmured the Sheriff, as he chewed a piece of a twig. "Chidwan is a bird. He flies with his feet. It would take me three days to do what he has done, to go into that camp and return."

"The Indian brave is the son of Talabam," exclaimed the chief proudly.

"He's the son of a gentleman," said the Sheriff quietly. "How many men did Hardeman kill that day, Chief?"

"Chidwan says four, and Chidwan speaks as the son of a chief."

"Chidwan's got fire-water inside of him, Bammy. He's dreaming the dreams of whiskey."

The Indian shook his head firmly.

"Chidwan speaks not from booze."

The Sheriff laughed: "My, Bammy! you're on to English all right. You've improved immensely."

"Me had seven white squaws in ten years," volunteered Talabam. "They come from Seattle and Victoria, and the chief studies the English."

"Bammy, you're a story-teller."

The chief winced. "Talabam lies not Wasco. Talabam like fifty-seven white squaws, but his Indian squaw not like. She great brave squaw. She chase 'em all back with tomahawk."

"I'm darned sorry, Bammy, old boy. It's sad," the Sheriff glanced at the chief's sphinx-like face, and bit his lip. Then he gazed silently down into the fog bank two thousand feet beneath, blotting out the trail, and amusement was swallowed up in the man's fiery impatience at the inert, insuperable obstacle.

"To-night I'm going down, Bam, to get him—fog or no fog," he said with a low snarl in his voice, his eyes blazing with the fierce hunger of the chase. I'll get him alive and take him back if I can. There'll be a fight like as not."

Talabam nodded, "Me go too. The fight is a white man's fight; but Talabam feels the air of the Chinook, and it carries the hot blood to the head."

"Bammy, if you butt in on this here proposition, I'll put a bullet in you. Hardeman's *mine*."

The Indian regarded his friend with a deep steady gaze. There was affection in it, and trepidation. Then he spoke slowly. "He killed four men. If he kill the Sheriff, the little devil-boy of the Thunder rapids—then Hardeman *mine*."

"You're the same old red-skin—darn you, Bammy, darn you!" said the Sheriff, turning on the chief with a laugh. But his face had

clouded for an instant before; Talabam's "if" was a grim possibility.

A silence fell upon the two, a silence that was pregnant with understanding. The red man and the white were thinking of the approaching meeting, and both knew well the deep and dire possibilities ahead of them. The Sheriff, young and courageous, a man who knew not the meaning of fear, was by no means oblivious to the side of the picture that might be presented. He knew that his own strength and quickness were to be relied on, and he had consummate faith in his Colt; but he was a man who had learned in life's battle never to under-rate the power of an adversary, and he knew that Hardeman was a man of iron muscle and great agility. He likewise knew that the chances of battle are turned by trivial blunders, by apparently unimportant mischances. Would the capture of Hardeman be effected by strategy, or by sudden meeting of force with force, or by some unexpected favoring chance? The Sheriff would plan out his campaign, he would endeavor to execute it to a nicety—but the possibility of a flaw was always there. The difference of a second in the handling of his weapon, the merest twitch of a muscle at the wrong time, the slightest indecision, if only for a single moment, would be met undoubtedly by Hardeman to the Sheriff's un-

doing. To face a coming fight, knowing all this, demands a well-nourished brain and steady nerves leashed with the power of will and courage.

The Sheriff only closed his jaw more grimly and the color of his dark tanned face assumed a ruddier hue as he thought of the approaching moment that would try him as he had never been tried before. His eyes shone with keen and steady light as they met Talabam's, and the Indian understood. He saw the red hue under the tanned skin, and knew that the devil boy of Wasco, his friend of old days, was blessed with a heart that pumped strong and full at the thought of conflict. There was no pallor of mental strain or physical weakness; there was cool, nonchalant, expectant, hopeful courage only.

His eyes kindling with the fire of the warrior, Chief Talabam broke the silence.

"Wasco," he said, pointing to the Sheriff's weapon, "if the bad man escapes the blue iron, it will be body against body—and Wasco must fight as he and Talabam fought when they were little braves and they were strong to learn. Fight, devil boy, as the grizzly fights the bull-moose."

The Sheriff nodded comprehendingly. Then quietly he pulled from the pocket of his coat a

small, dark-red, pebbly stone. Talabam leaned toward him with sudden and deep interest. "From the Silent Land," he exclaimed.

"Yes," nodded the Sheriff, "it's a rough ruby, Bam; but it's all right. I want you to hold it, and if Wasco dies give it to the white maiden and tell her that the Sheriff found it when he was climbing the mesa in the Land of Silence. And say, Bam, old boy, say to her that she might have it cut and put in gold; and ask her if she would wear it once in a while, pinned to the neck of her dress—just once in a long time—to remember the Land of Silence and the man who brought her home."

Talabam took the gem in silence, and stowed it safely away in his clothing; and the two watched the distant peaks, rising island-like above the fog bank, in thorough understanding.

But in his heart the redskinned Talabam did not believe it would be his to deliver the message.

"When Wasco finishes the hunt for the bad man, he begins the hunt for the maiden. Huh!" There was a sympathetic grin on his face, and the Sheriff felt the blood tingling to his neck.

"No, Bam. I'm only a miserable Sheriff; no money—nothing. And the lady she's a great, rich woman; and all the white millionaires are after her. They want her."

“What’s millionaire?”

“A man with heaps of money, Bam. A man who has money to burn—to spend—to give to the girl when he marries her.”

“How much money?”

“Oh, barrels full of gold, Bam. Barrels—rivers—tepees—houses full, full of gold.”

“Huh!” nodded the Indian, “Chief Butts call it dough.”

“That’s the idea,” echoed the Sheriff. “Dough. A millionaire is full o’ dough; that’s the word.”

“If Indian chief was millionaire he no fill up with gold—he fill up with whiskey,” murmured the Indian.

“There is very little difference between the red man and the white man, Bam. But I’m not in love anyway.” The Sheriff kicked a pebble abstractedly and watched it fall into space.

“The white hunter, the friend of Talabam, tells not the truth. He loves, and the chief knows it; for the chief sees the blood in his brother’s cheek and he sees the falling of his eyelids. Wasco poor like poor Indian, and he loves a great chief’s daughter. He steals her not, for he is a great brave, so he goes on the long trail far from her father’s wigwam.”

Talabam had lapsed into his own melodious language wherein expression was easier.

“Chief Butts is a great man. Once he told

Talabam that dough was great, greater than the four winds of heaven. But Talabam said nay—that gold was not everlasting like the winds; also the fair name of a brave was greater than gold. Wasco is wise. It might be the maiden would marry him, for white maidens are foolish like Indian maidens; and then for long winters and summers she would weep for the millionaires.”

“To hell with the millionaires!” exclaimed the Sheriff suddenly.

The Indian shook his head. “No, Wasco. The land of the hot fires, and the everlasting Chinook fog, and the itch, and the thirst that makes the stomach dry, is too much the land of peace for the men with the dough. Chief Butts says hell is too good for them.”

The Sheriff of Wasco sat on a rock and chortled.

“Bam—dear old Bam,—you’re the same darned fool you always were.”

The Indian’s eyes snapped and his teeth showed white through his weird smile. “The Sheriff must get the dough, and then the white maiden will be happy, for she loves, and her lover will have more than a millionaire.”

“Blame you, Bam, dry up. You’ve got wheels. You’re off. Your head is full of mountain air.”

“I know not of what Wasco mean. But he

shall be as rich as Talabam, and Talabam can buy horses and cattle and all the squaws in the country; but it no use to him, for his Indian squaw is strong and throws the tomahawk like the Evil One."

The Sheriff was blue in the face, but the chief was serious.

"Listen," he continued, "Wasco and Talabam kill Hardeman, then the Yakima will show to his brother a river that is small as a serpent. It runs through rock and sand into the great ocean, and leaves in the sands dough; dough that is fine, and dough that is big in lumps like the end of Wasco's finger, and that will fill barrels and houses and tepees. Below us is the mine of the Mandora, but Talabam's river runs a hundred times more gold than the mine will show in the lifetime of a grizzly."

The Sheriff of Wasco's face was a study. Amazement, interest, doubt were in it. A new and glorious world seemed already opening before him; it was as though the dream of a lifetime had in one moment been turned to truth.

"Why does Talabam tell his friend this?" he asked sceptically.

The Indian stepped nearer. "Because there is too much for one tribe. Wasco knows now why the family of Talabam is famous,—dough. And because the devil boy is a brave of a noble heart

and loves but one maiden—and because Talabam remembers the day that he fell in the Thunder Rapids.”

The Sheriff seized the Indian’s brown hand, but the chief’s eyes met his steadily as he went on :

“ The man who loves but one maiden is a great brave. He will make the history of his tribe sung from the sea of Behring to the Oregon. Talabam tells Wasco now to love one only ; for the evil spirit laughs when a chief loves too many, and his first squaw goes on the war-path.”

There was a note of plaintive sadness in the henpecked warrior’s voice, and the Sheriff realized that the woman question was as keen in the great Olympics as in the settlement of the white man.

He was about to answer cheerily when the Indian swung his hand eastward towards the opposite mountain. The Sheriff of Wasco shaded his eyes and peered across the deep valley. Now and again a dark spot seemed to fade across the face of the cliff and disappear. The Sheriff studied them carefully.

“ Men, Talabam? What does that mean?” he asked sharply.

“ Braves—the braves of the Yakimas,” was the laconic answer.

It was clear what the wily Talabam was doing. The Indians were to be in the mountains not far off when white man met white man; for the chief foresaw that the miners might rally round the new Boss when they saw him in danger at the law's hands, despite the fact that he had killed four of them but a short time before. Birds of a feather flock together the world over; and the western Olympics and the lonely mines of the coast were the hiding-places of many men who asked no questions and expected to answer none; who wished to be removed as far and as securely as possible from that product of civilization they hated and feared—the law.

“The braves must keep off,” said the Sheriff of Wasco harshly.

The other shook his head. “The Yakimas obey Talabam, not Wasco, and Talabam will make one white man fight one white man. If the gold-diggers want to fight the Sheriff all together, then the war-cry of the Yakimas will sound.”

“Look-a-here, Chief,” the Sheriff was angry, “look-a-here, now, I know how you feel about it; but don't let the braves come around near *me*. Understand?”

Talabam grunted disgustedly. “Yes, I keep the braves away. But the white brother shall

not go into the diggings alone; the men are all bad men."

"Bosh!" retorted the Sheriff spiritedly. "Alone, I'll go; and I'll get Hardeman too."

The chief shook his head stubbornly.

"The little white devil boy shall not go alone—his brother Bammy goes where he goes."

That afternoon the fog lifted from the valley and the miners' shacks were exposed to view. The desolate little settlement had long since forgotten its day of insubordination and its dead, and the New Boss was sitting on the step, chewing viciously, while the men sullenly slouched about their preparation for supper.

"To-morrow we'll clean up—an' to-morrow night I'll light out with a few sacks of the yaller from the creek yonder. Never saw the like of it," muttered the New Boss. "Meanwhile, I'll start a game to-night. Nothing like a good stiff one to make the boys ferget the departed. I'll stack the cyards to lose a few hundreds to 'em; that'll make 'em dead easy to handle."

He was suddenly interrupted. A tall plumed Indian, bow in hand, stalked across the camp from the forest opposite, straight towards the shack. A visit from an Indian was not uncommon; but the miners halted in their movements and viewed with interest the coming of this one;

for he was alone, and they knew him for the Chief Talabam.

Straight for the Boss he strode, and stopping in front of him remarked:

“The Chief wants whiskey.”

The Boss expectorated scornfully: “Nothin’ doin’, Chief. Rum and wimmin ain’t stoppin’ here.”

Talabam sat down on the ground disgustedly.

“Hunt no good,” he declared. “Talabam want get drunk.” The miners overhearing, chuckled. The chief was evidently on one of his sprees, occasions worthy of close attention.

“Fire-water!” demanded Talabam, again, “—rum!”

“Nothin’ doin’, Chief; only a game after supper!”

The Indian looked bored. “Talabam wait,” he nodded, “no whiskey; then game.”

The eyes of the Boss kindled. He would lose to the boys, but he would fleece this red-skin, and the boys would help.

The long evening began with the game in the open. The table was a couple of boards braced across two stones; the Boss sat on the top of a heavy box, his revolver beside him on the crude table. His assistant and a foreman, also heavily armed, stood carelessly near; but the miners were all unarmed as was the camp rule.

All hands were watching the game, in which sat five—the Indian the most unconcerned of the lot.

The Boss lost repeatedly, as he had purposed, and the men were secretly jubilant. Then the sign came, and the “skinning” of the Indian began.

The game was high. Every time that he lost, Talabam grunted, and reaching into his clothes brought forth nuggets and dust, and the miners’ eyes glistened with avarice. They had heard of his great wealth, but never had seen him so heavy with gold before. Usually when the Indian dealt, the pot was his; but though they had a shrewd suspicion that he cheated, none cared, for he was bound to lose in the end.

One by one the miners fell out, until the Boss was alone with Talabam. There was a feeling of unrest now; the men were afraid to sit in a game where the limit was the skies, and where the Boss was evidently betting with the company’s dust.

Talabam glanced at the darkening sky line, then reaching into his bosom drew forth a bag of nuggets.

The Boss dealt. All hands saw him “feed” himself an ace; but Talabam winced not.

“I go this,” he exclaimed, as he put the nuggets on the boards. It was a heavy hand; the heaviest many had ever seen.

The Boss called. The Indian had two pairs—the Boss four aces; and the men roared in glee.

“Talabam damn bad player,” said the chief slowly, as he arose. “The Sheriff of Wasco is heap better.”

That instant a stranger stepped to the board, and reaching sideways, handed his rifle to Talabam, without a word. His visored cap was cocked backward, his clean cut face, drawn tense, was young and handsome.

It was all so quickly done, so silently, that not a soul moved save the Boss, who slid his hand quietly towards his gun on the table.

The Sheriff hunched his right shoulder slightly, his hand moved downward; then his arm crooked, and a blue barrel gleamed in the evening light. The Boss had not closed on his weapon yet; he lacked the fraction of a second.

“Hands up, Hardeman—you’re my prisoner.”

The voice was ice. The sharp, low words ripped the chilled air like a knife-edge—but Hardeman, quick as the flash of an adder’s tongue, closed on his weapon. His brain had seen it all—it was his last chance; but to the onlookers it seemed minutes that the muzzle climbed upwards. Then came a roar from across the table and the outlaw’s weapon sailed backwards over his shoulder.



“Hands up, Hardeman — you’re my prisoner.”

The Sheriff of Wasco stood with smoking Colt in hand.

"Damn you," he drawled, "I told you 'hands up' and I meant it."

The outlaw raised both hands skyward. There was a bloody streak upon the right.

"Gentlemen, the Boss is Hardeman the outlaw, and I've come from Oregon with due authority to get him. And the first man who makes a move against the law—will—die—*now!*"

The voice was strangely quiet and rather pleasant; there was a melodious ring to it, and the youthful Sheriff half smiled as he spoke. But the words worked magic in the attitude of the men. Collected as they were from everywhere, and mostly of bad repute, they had early felt the tie of evil kinship in the New Boss, especially since the day he had arisen in his might and proved his mastership over them by murdering four of their number. So this man who had ruled them with iron hand—this Scott—was Hardeman, the great notorious outlaw. The revelation instantly raised him to the position of a hero in their eyes, and instinctively the wild outlawry and wickedness inherent in their natures awoke and swung them strongly in his favor and against the Sheriff of Wasco. To be sure, the Sheriff had the drop on the New Boss, and things looked black for him—but what of

that? This young, lithe, nonchalant Sheriff was an absurdity, talking of law's supremacy out here in the wilds—and to men such as they, who hated law as they hated poison. True, he was rated a desperate fighter, but that counted for naught; it was a foolish matter of reputation only. His voice was mellow and ringing and even pleasant, and that smile of his had no threat in it; he was a youngster making a strong play to *them*, fighters and desperadoes from everywhere, and they would teach him a lesson he would always remember—this rakish, over-confident fool of a youth.

A growl swept through the crowd, and glancing quickly one at the other they united upon their action. Hardeman should not be taken thus. This youngster with the cap was no match for men such as they were. His history?—his record? Bah! Moonshine!

They rushed forward in a body, the assistant Boss and the foreman with weapons drawn simultaneously. The Sheriff wheeled to face them, and his Colt blazed twice. The foreman toppled to the ground with a gasp. The assistant Boss stood upright for an instant; then his body spun and collapsed in a heap across the table, his lifted skull-cap gaping widely.

“I’m sorry, gentlemen,” spoke the Sheriff again. “Sorry—but it was foolish of them.”

The miners fell back in a mass, their faces blanched, their eyes staring large with fearful surprise at this self-contained, sarcastic *youngster*—as they had thought him. Then realization at the flood-tide swept down on them, and they turned and fled.—This was the man they had heard of, dreamed of, dreaded. And how they had misjudged him at first sight. Now he was here, near them, smilingly waiting to be interfered with, and they wanted no more.

The Sheriff turned to the outlaw, who with uplifted hands still stood as immovable as a statue, the sweat pouring from his face, and his blood-shot eyes riveted on his captor in deadly hatred.

“Will you come, Hardeman?—or shall we fight it out here, now?” The Sheriff grinned as he spoke, and the outlaw lurched forward, arms in air.

“You’ve got me,” he cried surlily. “But don’t you forget—the girl was mine *first*.”

He struck instinctively at the weak spot in his foe’s armor. The Sheriff’s face turned livid. The veins of his forehead swelled, and his face took on a fury fearful to see.

“Take that back,” he cried hoarsely. “Quick.”

Hardeman saw the barrel of the Sheriff’s Colt pointing straight at his face, and he lurched away.

“I’m a fool,” he muttered, “you win.”

Talabam stooped and picked up the fallen weapons of the dead men and the captive. Then the Sheriff ordered Hardeman’s hands down, and the chief bound them securely before him with a rope.

Once more the man with the Colt spoke,—quietly enough now.

“Hardeman, as the Sheriff, my duty is to take you back alive, if possible. If you attempt escape—or if you tell me any more of your damned lies—then it won’t be possible to take you back alive. Is the English clear? Now walk.”

Hardeman trudged forward along the trail to the mountains, the Sheriff and Talabam close behind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HARDEMAN'S DEFIANCE.

THE Sheriff hurried his prisoner up the trail at a terrific pace. With bound wrists the outlaw stumbled and lurched, and now and again Talabam was forced to pull him over a difficult section. Hardeman was meek enough now, but the Sheriff was on the lookout for treachery. There might be a rally among the miners, an attempted rescue at some dangerous spot ahead.

Darkness was falling with great rapidity. During one of the short periods of rest allowed the captive the chief turned and looked anxiously towards the Pacific in the distance. His companion's eyes followed, sweeping the horizon keenly and silently. Great black masses were advancing towards the zenith, and the evening stars overhead would soon be obscured in appalling darkness.

"Huh! Chief make for cave," grunted Talabam. "The storm comes, with the cold wind and the snow. We are high, Wasco, high."

On they trudged for perhaps two miles, then the Indian led downward a thousand feet, and along a spur of a granite ridge, where the footing was narrow and dangerous. They came out upon soft earth and rock formation, clothed here and there with scrub pines. A few minutes more, and, turning a rocky projection, they stood before a cave running back into the hill-side. The ground fell abruptly from the edge of a small plateau at the entrance, and the not far distant roar of water told of the rushing river below.

The chief struck a match, and determined that the place was empty. Crawling over the boulder that had fallen across the cave's mouth the three were soon within.

"Make fire now," said Talabam, "nobody come. Impossible."

Without, the wind whistled stormily, and protected as they were they were chilled to the marrow. The Chinook of the morning had given way to an icy blast from Behring Sea. Lightnings leaped forth, and thunder crashed repeatedly, throwing all the valley below into view, with its trees bending heavily to the blast.

Talabam collected wood, and soon had a small fire built; then Hardeman, apparently exhausted, his spirit broken, flung himself against

the boulder, and in a few minutes was deep in sleep.

Talabam dozed by the fire. The Sheriff sat on a flat stone, his eyes meditatively fixed on Hardeman. His revolver was in its holster, and his hands were clasped around one knee.

Minute after minute passed while he sat there like a statue in bronze, his eyes showing no weariness, his face stern and quiet and emotionless. The cold rain had long since come like a deluge, and turned to hail that pounded the face of the mountain without with a din that confused all other sounds.

Talabam shook himself into wakefulness. Then the Sheriff gave him his seat and moved around in an attempt to warm up. Two of the captured revolvers were swinging at the chief's hip, while Hardeman's gleaming Colt lay beyond the boulder, where it had been placed well out of his possible reach.

The Sheriff stood over him and gazed into his exhausted face.

"An evil spirit, Wasco," volunteered the chief gruffly. "An evil spirit that sleeps."

The Sheriff was thoughtful.

"Yes, Bam—a bad man, but he's close to death now. He's a poor devil after all."

The chief spat disgustedly into the fire.

"Wasco don't like kill men. Wasco too much tender heart."

The Sheriff shook his head.

"The chief does not like to kill either. But the chief will kill if it must be—and so it is with Wasco."

They listened to the furious storm. It was raining again. Rivulets from the banks above trickled across the cave's mouth and disappeared in the sandy plateau. The river somewhere below was now a torrent, dashing vehemently onward toward the forest and the distant ocean. The darkness without was appalling, save when the lightning flashed. Occasionally a dull, curious, grinding sound became audible, which lasted a minute or so, perhaps, then grew to a cracking roar that ceased as the earth shook with a distant impact. The Indian broke the silence of the two men, and there was anxiety in his voice. "The earth moves, Wasco."

Every man in that region had seen the whole or part of a mountain side slip from its granite ribs, and slide thundering into the valley. Often these slides were small and unimportant and did not materially change the landscape, but at times, especially after a heavy rain, and when the valley beneath became undermined by torrential downpours, a large section of the mountain

slopes would break away and rush irresistibly downward.

Even as Talabam spoke the wind and the rain and the torrent seemed to redouble their fury.

"Where rests the white maiden and her father?" queried the chief hurriedly. "Wasco said in the valley below yonder?"

"Yes," said the Sheriff, "at Jones' cabin. There is danger, Bam, that the valley will be flooded with this rain."

Another interval of silence fell in the cave, while the Sheriff's mind, occupied with this new anxiety, was somewhat withdrawn from the captive, who to all appearance slept. He was recalled on a sudden by a slight, stealthy fumbling of the bound hands, and he found Hardeman's malevolent eyes fixed steadily and watchfully on him. It was manifest that the outlaw had been feigning sleep and had overheard part at least of the conversation.

For a few seconds neither of the two spoke. It seemed to Talabam that the two white men each measured the strength of the other in their silent, comprehensive stare; then the Sheriff leaned nearer to the captive, and his quiet but relentless voice could be heard clearly beneath the howl of the wind.

"Don't meddle with that rope, Hardeman.

It's your only hold on life just now—and you might loosen it."

"You've got my gun. What would you do?—shoot?" inquired the prisoner, braving it out with an evil smile.

The Sheriff's silence was significant enough for answer, but it did not satisfy Hardeman's accumulated spite and hatred of the man who had beaten him.

"Loose me yourself. Give me my gun, an' let's fight this quarrel out man to man. Maybe my hold on life ain't any shorter 'n yours if I had your show. Are you afraid to take the chance?"

The firelight showed a slight flush on the Sheriff's face, but otherwise he gave no sign that the taunt of such a man as this had power to disturb him.

"You got your chance some hours back, Hardeman, an' lost it," he said equably. "Besides which, this here's no personal matter between you an' me. I'm Sheriff, an' it's my duty to take you back to Wasco an' let the law settle with you. That's what I'm goin' to do, though it's certainly violatin' certain private feelin's I hold regardin' you."

"Skulkin' behind yer office," laughed Hardeman, sneeringly. "Couldn't you possibly forget you was a sheriff an' be a man fer five

minutes?" With mockery on his lips he raised himself on his elbows to a sitting posture and leered steadfastly at the quiet Sheriff. "You don't think this is a personal matter, eh?" he inquired slowly. "Well, I do. It's a blamed personal matter with me, an' I'm goin' to talk about it."

"Better not," said the Sheriff.

But the mocking voice deliberately went on. Hardeman knew his man, and knew just how far the cobweb restraints of duty and honor would hold such a one. To him it was diverting to think that they held at all. Never in his life had Hardeman been guilty of any such foolishness.

"Say, you've got the best o' me, haven't you? I'm talkin' here to you as man to man, but you don't have to listen. I'm in a bad fix. You're Sheriff, an' you've got my gun. I'm all tied up too; couldn't hurt you if I wanted. Why don't you shoot me, an' throw my body into the river? There ain't anybody goin' to ask you questions; an' if they did you could tell 'em it was all in the line o' yer duty. *That's* one o' the beauties o' bein' Sheriff, ain't it?" Hardeman paused; enjoyment curled the corners of his hard wild mouth upward as he perceived the work of emotions on the face opposite; then he discharged another shot from his plentiful ammu-

nition of spite. "No danger o' this redskin tellin' as how you did it because I loved the same girl you did?"

There followed a tense, doubtful second when the Sheriff's long body tightened as though every muscle in it were preparing to leap. Talam in the shadow grunted hopefully, and the jeering reprobate by the boulder winced perceptibly and his evil mouth stiffened. Possibly he had gone too far. Next second he knew he was safe as yet. His captor's strenuous body was nearer to him by a foot, but it had relaxed, and the look which had brought a vision of instant death had passed.

"I'm Sheriff. You seem to have got that lucky fact pretty well fixed in your mind, an' I guess you don't count on any o' these low tricks o' yours to make me forget it. All the same I'm human, an' you be careful."

Again ensued that long, fierce, wordless contest of strength in which only the eyes of the combatants fought; and in which Hardeman acknowledged defeat by a loud, jeering laugh, and rolled his body further off.

"No offense, Sheriff. Thought you said it wasn't a personal matter." Then the passion of violence and wrath burning in the man burst through his thin crust of pretence; his lips drew back in a snarl, and his face assumed the look of

a strange, dangerous beast. Rage shook his voice above its vicious, treacherously even pitch.

"Damn it, you think you've got a copyright on love. I was first in that love game, an' you know it. That's what bites you. 'Taint no matter o' law nor Wasco, but just that. Hand over my gun, an' come out from behind yer office an' fight. Our ways o' playin' a love game differ considerable. I ain't got the natural high tone of a sheriff, but if you hadn't took a hand when you did I guess my way 'd 'a won out. You wouldn't 'a figgered—you hear?—you skulkin' poltroon of a weazened Sheriff."

The Sheriff heard him out in silence, with a look of strong yet patiently-restrained disgust. Only when the talk wandered toward the girl his hand had slipped downward to his side, perhaps in warning, more likely in anger, but had hung there inactive after the first impulse. The warmth of his face showed whether the words had bitten, but with a quietude of authority not to be gainsaid he brought the interview to a prompt finish.

"Hardeman, from now on keep your tongue leashed. I am taking you back to Wasco alive, if I can. Perhaps you don't quite catch the logic of that procedure. There isn't a man livin' that would like to meet you hand-to-hand better than I would, but there's a something governing

me now that you never could properly appreciate, an' that's what white men call duty. Once we get back, the boys will give up a lynching, maybe, to satisfy your anxiety for a fight. Meanwhile you shut up tight. Understand? Tight!"

There was an indefinable something in the Sheriff's voice, a peculiar melodious ring—low and rather pleasant. Hardeman had heard the note before, when the Sheriff had captured him. He remembered the end of the foreman and the assistant Boss, and he knew that death was behind that voice. With a grunt of malice he turned and rolled himself into a heap by the boulder.

A long silence fell again within the cave; but as the night wore on the storm began to show signs of abating. Talabam, seated with his back against one wall of the cave, nodded wearily, the dancing light of the camp fire reflected between his closing eyelids. The Sheriff was still quietly watching the outlaw, who to all appearances had returned to his slumbers by the boulder. Once or twice the crafty prisoner had turned as though in troubled sleep, and each time that he did so he opened his eyes slightly and with such care as to elude even the fixed regard of the Sheriff. Only for a fleeting second did Hardeman's glance turn upward to

the roof of the cave, but what he saw there brought hope and patience to his heart.

The minutes passed by and ran into the half hour; when on the silence and quietude of the three men there came a momentary creak, a sucking sound; and next instant part of the earthy roof above their heads came tumbling down, spreading itself in a slimy mass upon Talabam and the Sheriff, and followed by a volume of water from above.

The two were momentarily covered, and the awaited opportunity had come to Hardeman. With a spring he was up and upon Talabam, and by one sweeping blow of his tied hands on the Indian's jaw felled him like a log. Next instant he had leaped for the Sheriff, who, blinded by the mass of ooze and water from above, was caught at disadvantage. Hardeman's body struck him with the shock of a catapult, and sent him staggering and sprawling backward to the floor of the cave. In the same moment the desperado had stooped and secured the cartridge belt and revolver at the foot of the boulder, and grasping them both in his bound hands leveled the ugly Colt at the dazed, half-blinded Sheriff, who was making desperate efforts to arise to his feet.

It was Hardeman's hour. He could not have wished a finer or more glorious moment than

this of complete triumph over his sworn enemy; and the mocking devil in him delayed his vengeance a little that he might enjoy it the better.

“I’ve got you now, my infant. Got you straight, ain’t I?” he inquired, with a low, malignant chuckle. “Thought you’d stack up against Hardeman, did you? You made a mistake, son. You’re dead easy, you are.”

Talabam, only half conscious, groaned and made an effort to rise, but reeled back into oblivion again.

The Sheriff of Wasco, despite the pointing weapon, struggled up to his feet and his hand descended to his Colt. Before he could grasp it he received a well-directed kick in the stomach. As the nerve impulses ascended from the solar plexus he felt a curious warmth pervade his frame, to be instantly succeeded by a tingling of arms and legs, followed by indescribable nausea and dizziness. He tried to move, but his legs were as lead; his arms swung before him without sensation. With a groan of unutterable anguish he sank to the floor as Hardeman bent above him.

“Well—well—well! there goes one busted reputation. The Sheriff of Wasco, eh? Say, you darned little apology for a lady’s lover—what did you think you could do to Hardeman? It’s my turn now, ain’t it? Where’s yer law

now? An' say—where's yer dear, beloved duty, that you spell with capitals? Duty? Gosh, you weazened pup, don't you wish now you'd killed me when you had the chance? Duty! Hell!"

The Sheriff arose on his arm, and Hardeman kicked him violently backward.

"Now, Sheriff, say yer prayers," he commanded. "You first, then that Indian." As he spoke he lowered the Colt in both hands till the muzzle rested a foot from the other's head.

The Sheriff's mind was clearing from its late dizziness; his brain was resuming its usual, lightning-swift activity. He observed that Talabam was recovering; and realized that, with another few seconds saved, death might even yet be averted.

"I've this to say," he drawled slowly, faintly, but without quiver in his voice, "Hardeman, you appear to win. But when that gun of yours barks there will be twenty of Talabam's braves in this cave. They are less than a hundred feet back on the trail."

The Sheriff of Wasco knew he held no card worth mentioning, so he bluffed; but he did it so well that Hardeman for a second hesitated uncertainly. Then, with an oath, he shoved his gun into the Sheriff's face and pulled trigger. The hammer of the Colt smashed down, but there was no response. Again he pulled, and

again. The weapon responded not. Instantly he realized for the first time that it was empty, and in the same second the Sheriff saw it, and his hand descended to his own weapon and it flew from its holster. But Hardeman had whirled and was lumbering away down the soggy trail, before the Sheriff in his weakened condition could rise and follow. The latter staggered outside and down the trail in pursuit, but the wild night and the blackness prevented a sight of the fugitive. He heard the faint thudding of the outlaw's feet as he sped clumsily along with bound hands grasping both his weapon and his cartridge belt; then suddenly there arose a hoarse cry and a rumble. The earth of the trail shook, and the rocks ahead began to roll down from the higher levels above. The Sheriff of Wasco halted, and stooping to his knees, listened. He could hear a man's struggles in the down-rushing of wet and weakened earth across the trail. There was a hoarse, frightened curse in Hardeman's voice, and then the human words were lost in the steady rolling and grumbling of the earth as it separated from the granite backing and went slowly downward into the ravine or the river below.

Awe-stricken by the sudden strange chance, the Sheriff hastily made his way back up the trail to Talabam, whom he found rapidly recovering.

A few words acquainted the chief with the narrowness of their escape and the unlooked for turn of events in their favor.

"He nearly finished us both, Bam. If only that shooting iron of his had been loaded—" The Sheriff shook his head solemnly. "It was no foresight of mine that it wasn't. I knew better too, an' 'twould have served me sorter right to have to cash in my checks for not remembering the rascal I was dealin' with. Guess it must have been you who unloaded his gun, Talabam.

A smile of ready but suppressed pride crossed the Indian's face as he met the Sheriff's inquiring look.

"The Yakima knew that Wasco and the bad man were at war. The Yakima is Wasco's friend; so he emptied the blue iron."

"You did! Talabam, you're a big chief. Darn you Bam, darn you, you saved my life," said the Sheriff with deep feeling. But Talabam only remarked "Huh!" shortly and expressively; and the two understood one another thoroughly.

"The bad man's gone; and he's killed," said the Sheriff, as they peered over the edge of the precipice.

"It's only two hundred feet, Wasco; the earth moved easily. Hardeman lives perhaps, and he

has the blue iron; it will not be empty long, for he has the belt and the cartridges."

"Damn!" said the Sheriff, looking helplessly at his companion, his face dark with conviction and chagrin.

As they stood there angrily silent there came a momentary lull in the wind, and they heard a curious sound rise from below. It was a hoarse voice, full of venom and hatred. "Sheriff," it cried, "you won the last hand. I win the next. Your girl 's at Jones'—is she? Thanks for your damned information."

The Sheriff with a furious oath leaned far out over the precipice, but the chief jerked him backward, and with one sweep of his arm knocked the illuminating embers into space. "The evil spirit not sleep all the time we think, Wasco. Now perhaps he shoot," he grunted fiercely.

"She's mine now, Sheriff," came the voice from below again, "damn you! think of the love I'll make."

"We're prisoners," cried the Sheriff furiously, glancing down at the abyss below him, "and that devil is loose out there to do as he pleases. He'll cut the rope that binds him on the edge of some rock, and then——"

"It was the will of the Great Spirit. Wasco could not stay the rain or the storm; but my

brother will fight the bad man yet. This is a Yakima cave—a warrior's cave. It has two trails. One to come and one to go. Listen," said the chief, as they started along a passage leading from the back of the cave through the mountain side. "Listen, Wasco, Talabam goes to tell Chidwan to catch the bad man if he goes to the setting sun, and then Talabam goes to tell Chief Butts. Wasco will take the back trail down to the valley, and he will be with the white maiden before the bad man. If Wasco fights may the Great Spirit be with him!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A MIDNIGHT VISIT.

DIRECTLY the Sheriff had left her in Hilltown, Myra sped in haste to her own room, womanlike flashing a keen glance in her mirror to see whether she had been in his eyes all that she wished. But she saw less of herself than of his strong, romantic presence, bidding her impassioned farewell. She held her palms to her hot cheeks, half ashamed.

“I’ve been unmaidenly, maybe—but I don’t care. I don’t care. I simply had to find out,” she breathed defiantly. Stepping hurriedly and noiselessly to the window, she watched him as he passed round the bend and out of sight, his cap set backward, his rifle tucked in the crook of his arm in careless security, every stride of his long legs bespeaking fearlessness and honesty and unshakable confidence in himself.

“Hardeman, indeed!” she whispered in deep self-contempt. “How could I have been so silly? And now he’s off with that precious money notion in his head; and it’s so unnecessary,” she

sighed. "Well, I can't do anything? I've done too much as it is. He thinks it's his duty to make his fortune. And I'm to remember, please, that he's the Sheriff of Wasco." A dreamy smile, half pride, lit up her blue eyes. "Gracious, he's lovely when he's stubborn. But I shouldn't think of interfering with him."

Two days later, when he was already many miles advanced on his journey, she and her father, that corpulent millionaire, set out on horseback together for the mines.

Mr. Thorn was happy but anxious, remembering what the Sheriff had said. More than ever he was ready to play the obedient parent to this beautiful recovered daughter of his. He would have loved her more than ever perhaps, only that he had long reached the limit of his powers of devotion. Observing that Myra was thoughtful, his mind reverted to "that fellow from Wasco," with redoubled suspicion. Mr. Thorn had repeatedly expressed his good opinion of the Sheriff, but to all his remarks Myra had said very little. This was unusual enough to attract the shrewd old gentleman's attention.

"That Sheriff now—he didn't mention to you where he was going, I'll bet. He's a clam when it comes to talking about his own business," ventured Mr. Thorn as they galloped along.

"He told me he was going to make his fortune," Myra called back.

"Um! Given up the idea of getting Harde-
man, has he? Well, it's a dangerous job rather.
I don't blame him."

"Oh, no," Myra corrected sweetly, "he hasn't
given up the idea of getting Hardeman. That's
a big mistake of yours, daddy."

"*H'mm!*" Mr. Thorn's exclamation was now
dry and emphatic. "Funny thing he should talk
to you about making his fortune. What d'you
suppose he means by it?"

Myra's pretty mouth curled upward slightly
at the corners. "Well it struck me, father, he
meant he was going to be a corpulent million-
aire," she said innocently.

"He did, the impudent cuss," snorted her
father. "Why didn't he mention it to me, then?
I might have put him in the way of something,
just to get even with him for bringing my
daughter back."

"Oh, I don't think he's that kind exactly—
the kind you could pay for services rendered to
a lady," said Myra. "Anyway you couldn't half
satisfy him. He's going to the Klondike to bring
back a mountain or two, he said. His ideas are
quite large, you see."

"Quite modern, I should say," Mr. Thorn be-
gan, but his daughter, flicking her horse gaily,

had already bolted far ahead. "Race me to Craddock's," she called back laughing, "and don't worry about the Sheriff. He isn't worrying any over you." So Mr. Thorn finished his remarks to the landscape. "Mountain h'mm! Well, he'll get it, I guess. Hope he hasn't got his eye on anything belonging to me, but I ain't so sure of it. He's the kind that gets what he goes after. And that's the kind I like, by thunder!"

By evening they had completed the first half of the journey. At night they slept in the log cabin of a woodman which stood in a lonely little clearing not far from the road. All about them was dense forest, and Myra fell asleep with the mournful singing of the pines in her ears, and dreamed that a desperate battle was taking place between the Sheriff of Wasco and Hardeman, while she herself looked on, utterly helpless, unable to distinguish between them.

When the half-dead victor crawled to her feet, entreating her kindness, her heart gave a great leap of terror. She knew not which of them he was, nor which was the dead man. Trembling with fear she awoke, and slipping over to her window looked out. The pines were cutting a jagged circle in the sky, all sown with the glittering star-dust of a million worlds. The haunting

tree-music oppressed her with dread. Was her dream mere foolishness, or was it a portent of disaster?

Her father came to her relief. All unconsciously his snores rose on the midnight, gentle but determined, for he was weary, poor man. Myra's fears fled. Smiling, she looked at the starry circle above the pines, and her lips moved: "God keep him—the right one—from peril," she breathed, and feeling guilty but happy went back into bed and slept until morning.

The Sheriff still dwelt in Mr. Thorn's mind that second day as he had on the first. They were drawing near to the mine country now, and knowing the Sheriff's dislike of the locality and his reasons for it, Mr. Thorn was the prey of a lively anxiety to know how the young man's quest was faring. Was it true that Hardeman was in the mines—the very mines of which he was the chief owner? The old man secretly resented it as a "fresh" notion of the Wasco man's, but the question was certainly engrossing, and raised in him the earnest desire to be present should the Sheriff and his quarry come face to face. But he did not desire that his daughter Myra should be present; and here in the benevolent darkness of his mind he thought he foresaw difficulty.

Towards sunset they arrived at Jones' cabin.

This had always been their stopping-place. The mines were but ten miles beyond, and they usually rode out to them in the morning after breakfast. Those ten miles were the loveliest part of the whole journey in Myra's opinion.

The log cabin was not dissimilar to the one in which they had passed the previous night. It was larger and more generally pretentious, and the forests around had grown thinner with the approach of the coast line. Jones, the cabin's present owner, was a woodman; but it had been owned and built in the first place by a rich San Franciscan, who had come up into the woods and mountains of the Olympics in search of health. The cabin bore tokens of its first ownership in the neglected rose-bushes and other garden shrubs, now rapidly lapsing back to primitive wildness. The clearing was grown high with grass and tiny tree saplings, all in a hopeless, luxuriant tangle, except where a well-laid corduroy path led from the cabin door through the woods to the trail by which the travelers had come.

One might stand at the door and look across the clearing at the scattered ranks of dusky tree forms, following them as they receded and grew dimmer and dimmer till they merged with the vast army of their brethren. Here Myra stood watching the stormy sunset, and thinking—what

unknown thoughts?—when her father joined her, and decided it was a good moment to try his diplomacy.

“What a truly lovely spot this is, daughter. An ideal corner to rest in after our long journey, isn’t it?”

“Lovely,” answered his daughter, “provided you won’t snore to-night, father!” and she smiled on him.

“Shucks! All a dream of yours, ma’am. I never snore,” and he winked atrociously. “I’m afraid you must be dreadfully tired to-night, my dear.”

“Oh, not particularly. I’ve been here before you know,” said Myra.

“You look utterly exhausted. I almost blame myself for letting you come so far. Don’t know whatever I should do if you got down sick, Myra,” he pursued solicitously. “Tell you what now—I’ve just thought of this idea this minute. Suppose you stay here to-morrow and rest up while I go on and finish up this business. I’ll be back by noon, and I’ll feel ever so much easier about you. How’s that?”

He put the finishing query with a faltering accent, for his daughter’s eyes were fixing him in frank surprise. “Stay here?” she repeated blankly, and then his look of duplicity turned on the light somewhere in her brain, and to his

huge concern, she broke forth into merry, sceptical laughter.

"You dear story-telling old bungler," she cried mirthfully, shaking her finger at him. "Stand right there and tell me the truth, sir—for I know it."

"You know——?"

"Yes, I know. This is all the Sheriff of Wasco's doing, not yours. Goodness, he's foxy," said Myra, suddenly remembering how he had let her think herself the victor in this very matter.

"So he told you, eh? Told me he didn't want you to know," and Mr. Thorn felt very much relieved. "Don't be alarmed, daughter, I hardly think he'll find Hardeman down there. It's just a notion of his, you know."

"Hardeman?" gasped Myra. "In the mines? No, no, he didn't tell me that. And the Sheriff—is he there, too?"

Perceiving that, diplomatically, he had made a mistake, Mr. Thorn at once made full confession of the duplicit Sheriff's intentions. Ten chances to one it was all an old fool notion, this of Hardeman being in the mines. But the Sheriff had meant well; and, being the smooth but iron man he was, he had bound her father to keep her away from all chance of alarm and unpleasantness.

Myra listened, tapping her foot slightly, the first spark of indignation in her blue eyes giving way to a half smile that looked like a gleam from the cloudy sunset.

“He’s very kind and so are you, daddy. You’ve both treated me exactly as if I was a baby, and I ought to be thankful,” she said with an unthankful rise of her pretty chin. “You’ve been so awfully nice I’m going to give you the least little bit of advice: Don’t talk about the Sheriff’s ‘old fool’ notions just yet. If you knew him as well as I do you’d wait to see how they turn out first.”

It was a piece of advice that left her father ruminating suspiciously for the rest of the evening.

At nightfall a tremendous storm which had been gathering all evening burst not far from them. Rain descended in sheets; and the pines roared and swayed and lashed themselves to fury under the whipping of the winds. The lightning flashes revealed the splendid storm spectacle to the watchers in the cabin, but the crackling thunder made speech impossible. They watched in silence, awed by the greatness of it. After an hour or two its worst fury abated, and the forest lay fresh and wet under a clearing sky, hushing itself to sleep with low mutterings of spent passion.

Sleep did not visit Myra's eyelids for a long time that night. Alternately confident and afraid she lay watching the fitful moonbeams struggling through her small window, realizing all too clearly what her father's news meant. What fearful thing might not be happening even now? She did not fear for herself,—oh no. With her smooth iron man only ten miles away she knew there was no need. But what of him? How was he faring on this deadly task he had set himself?

She did sleep at last; but some time in the depth of night she was suddenly awakened by quick footsteps on the log path approaching the house. No other sound followed for a long time, though she listened with painful intentness, bravely fighting off the fear of something unknown. At last she caught the sound of men's voices, pitched in a low and careful key. Her fears of brewing mischief rose to the highest pitch. Tremblingly she rose, groped about for her dress and put it on after a fashion. Jones must be awakened and warned. But just at that instant she distinguished the voice of Jones himself, and his carefully spoken words left her petrified with surprise and relief.

"All right, Sheriff. 'Course you please yer-self about it. But I'd keep watch from the inside if it was me." To this there followed a low

word of dissent, and then the closing of a window.

But the sound of that other voice had turned Myra's whole body to fever heat. Helplessly she sank down on the edge of her bed. The Sheriff! what was he doing here? What could have happened to send him here at this hour? Then despite all her consternation a smile forced its way to her trembling lips, and she hid her face among the pillows. No matter why or how—so he was here.

Scaring up courage she rose swiftly and looked at her moonlit image in the little mirror, busily tucking in her nightgown which was sticking out scarecrow fashion all round her collar. Then she sat down again and helplessly regarded the window.

“I'll go right to sleep and forget all about him; that's the proper course,” she declared. “Oh, pshaw—nobody takes the proper course under such circumstances as these.” Tiptoeing over she raised the merest corner of the curtain, but dropped it again with a gasp and fled backward to the bed, where she lay curled in a heap, laughing and blushing gloriously to her very finger-tips. She had seen the Sheriff out there, a few feet off, his eyes thoughtfully directed toward her window; and he had seen her, which was infinitely worse.

An interval ensued. Then a wet white rose from the garden flew through the upper part of the window, and struck the floor with a thud of appeal.

"Perfectly audacious," breathed Myra, quickly appropriating it. "I don't approve of such carryings-on, and I'll certainly tell him so to-morrow."

Another rose—this time with a prayer wrapped round the stalk: "Please come to the window."

"No, sir; it's after midnight," scribbled Myra severely. She threw the rose back and waited hopefully.

Back it came. "Important. Do come, please. *N. B. It has been midnight to me for three days.*"

"Oh, indeed," breathed the girl, her eyes gleaming. "Good heavens, just supposing father happened to be awake." Then she pursed her lips in doubt over the "important," and going very lightly to the window opened it softly as the disturber was bending down to pluck more roses by which to dispatch further entreaties. Three of his long steps brought him to her; she let him take her hand through the window as she whispered with smiling severity: "Well, sir, what do you want?"

His answer was in his face, so close to hers, and

dimly illumined by moonlight. Her hand fluttered slightly in his strong, close clasp.

"I want to see you—what else?" he laughed in a low, thick, passionate whisper. "There are other things, maybe; but they'd have kept. To see you, that's the biggest want of my life."

"Oh, but you should have waited," she said breathlessly. She wished to chide him a little, but her face had somehow caught the reflection of his, and for one sweet, throbbing minute they looked silently at each other, Myra's blue eyes half afraid, yet wholly glad and tender." You *know* you ought to have waited, Sheriff."

"Yes, I ought, but I couldn't. Not after I caught sight of you, you know. Three days, and then a chance like this! There's a spice of Hardeman in me; you were dead right about that." The Sheriff laughed and relinquished his grasp of her hand, his eyes brimming with other and violently restrained intents. "You'll forgive me just this once?"

"I'll wait and see if you ever do it again before I promise," said Myra, folding her arms on the window-sill and looking provokingly lovely and reproving. "Now about those other things—the important ones?"

This broke the spell for a moment.

"Which things?" he inquired with innocence, but business like.

"Don't pretend. The things about Hardeman, of course," she said severely, "I got it all out of father last night."

"Pshaw, your father's no disciplinarian. He ought to keep you in better order," he grinned. "Well, if you know, there ain't anything for me to tell."

"Yes, there is. Sheriff what are you doing here, at this hour of the night? Don't make a baby of me," she pleaded eagerly.

But he would not tell her the whole story, because the reserve which men of deeds feel in talking of their purposes was strong in him, at least until his purpose should be accomplished. He was on the trail of that rascal Hardeman finally, he said. This, joined to some slight anxiety on her account, had led him to the cabin, where he meant to keep watch until morning, when it was his urgent desire that she and her father would abandon their proposed stay in the neighborhood and go at once under his escort back to Hilltown. She was not to feel alarmed of course. But his plan was best, beyond question. Let her put herself implicitly under his direction and he would guarantee that no harm would come to her.

For the moment his eyes had grown keen and hard. Little of him was lover now. He was the indomitable Sheriff, giving his fighting

orders, and not to be thwarted even by so important a young lady as Myra Thorn.

Recognizing this, Myra's soul at once fell down in secret worship before him.

"But suppose," she said, a little breathlessly, "suppose he comes to-night! You have no shelter."

A laugh like a low grunt issued from the Sheriff's throat. "Wish he *would*, but I guess there's no such luck," and Myra suddenly understood much she had heard concerning him, as well as her own utter and adoring absence of all fears on his account.

"I'll be ready and I'll have father ready, certainly," she said softly, raising her hands to draw down the window—"good-night."

But in a flash the grim warrior was merged into the grim ardent lover. Taking advantage of her attitude his long arm shot out swiftly and detained her, and in fiery whispers he was entreating:

"Don't go; don't punish me like that. I've been wasting time talking. You think for one minute, I'd get you out here to discuss that dog Hardeman and his ways? *Be hanged to him!*"

The passionate yet gentle force of his arm took Myra's strength from her. Feebly protesting "to-morrow—to-morrow," she strove to loose

it, but could not fight her love of this stern tempest of a man, the bursting flood of whose passion was a torrent.

“To-morrow to the dickens! *Now!*” he breathed in soft triumph. “You see, I love you, and I’ve found that fortune. Remember what you said about that?”

“No, I cared nothing for your fortune,” she denied, flashing out brilliantly at him.

“Ah, but I did. It had to be a part of me. Oh, I love you—*I love you!*” and then, save for a long sigh of happiness, he became as silent as the trees of the forest.

“Will you have me, Myra, for better or worse?” he demanded presently in a whisper of delight.

“I certainly won’t promise you at any such unearthly hour as this,” said his captive, her lips tingling from furious impact, yet smiling adorably on him. “If you were any one in the world but the Sheriff of Wasco, I’d call father,” she whispered. “But oh, being you, I do love you.”

Struggling for speech and breath, she resumed after an interval, her hair fallen across his arms, her eyes bright and dewy: “No, sir,—not once again. Let me go. Yes, to-morrow, perhaps. What hours they do choose in Wasco for calling on a lady,” and with her hand against his eager

persuasive lips she fled backward through the window, then drew it down. So, shaking his head disapprovingly, he picked up his rifle and betook himself to watch for a certain Mr. Hardeman, outlaw and escaped prisoner of his, who he hoped might incautiously wander into that vicinity.

His vigil, however, went without reward, so far as Hardeman was concerned.

But some hours later, when the sky overhanging the great American continent to the eastward was turning pink and gold behind the jagged pine crests, Mr. Thorn, being an early riser, made a discovery, and the result of it sent him full of important news to his daughter's door.

"Myra, my dear, you'll have to hurry. I guess you were right last night—er, about the Sheriff. He's here, and he's seen Hardeman——"

"Gracious! you don't say so. The Sheriff?" said a queer voice within.

"Fact. He got the villain right in my mines as he expected. But there was a bad mishap, a landslide on Flower Butte, and in the mix-up Hardeman was separated and got off—without a scratch too, I guess. Poor Sheriff feels bad over it; but he'll get him again soon, and I'd certainly hate to be that outlaw. Meantime he wants to get us straight back to Hilltown out

of the mess—and I think, daughter, we'd better pull up stakes right after breakfast, and go."

"Good Heavens, a landslide; and he never once—. Oh yes, I'm coming. I've simply got to make myself a bit presentable on Mr. Jones' account, but I'll be right out, daddy."

"Landslide! I guess there were two of them," she whispered, as she smoothed out the hair which the Sheriff's hand had smoothed. "How strong he is. And oh—" here she stretched her arms deliciously, "how very, very happy I am. Thank God," and her lips trembled, "his first landslide didn't seem to have affected him very seriously."

Half an hour later the cavalcade of three bade farewell to their host of the night and sped rapidly away, the Sheriff on the further side of Myra, riding Jones' borrowed horse. They traveled fast, for he was anxious to make the journey that same day. Several times during the morning Myra wondered whether she really knew her lover. Now that he was on the trail, bent on the peculiar business she knew of, the veil of his reserve was perfect. He was all Sheriff, this handsome, easy rider, who listened to her father's gossip with almost lazy gentleness, his hard swift glances meantime sweeping every spot of concealment on the hillside. To herself he accorded the unimpeachable courtesy he

would have given any lady in his charge, while all the time his twelve-hour-old kisses burned her memory, and only an occasional volcanic smolder in his gray-blue eyes as they rested on her betrayed that he too remembered. Often he rode ahead to reconnoiter some turn where the trail grew narrow and the woods approached too close; for Hardeman had not appeared, and he feared that the wily outlaw would double and make for some hidden point in the road ahead of them.

Late in the forenoon they descried a solitary red man running swiftly along the uplands in their direction. The surefootedness and agility of the antelope were in his tireless, graceful leaps, his chest and head were bent forward, his arms moved but slightly at his sides and his long bow swung before his breast. They watched him admiringly as he came swiftly on to intercept them.

"It's Talabam," said the Sheriff, with a low chuckle of satisfaction, "Talabam returning from Butts' camp. The Chief has been on the run for hours."

They halted and greeted the Indian, who stoically returned their salutations. His business was with the Sheriff, whom he drew aside for hasty consultation.

"Away, Wasco," he said briefly, "away to the

camp with the maiden. The bad man is yonder, only half a mile above, trailing you."

"He is—eh?" drawled the Sheriff. "And you, Bammy? you're on foot, old fellow; how about you?"

"Talabam will run with the millionaire. The chief's legs are swift, and his eyes are keen. Go, Wasco, with the maiden. Talabam is Wasco's friend and will keep the millionaire away."

There was command in the chief's voice and a deep twinkle in his eyes. "Talabam will take the old warrior," he exclaimed hurriedly. "Go."

In this new order they dashed along. The Sheriff and Myra were soon well in advance, Mr. John Thorn suiting his speed to the Indian, who now and again slackened to look back to where the outlaw might be, and incidentally to let the two lovers get farther away.

Talabam and Mr. Thorn talked but little, for the father was anxious and the Indian reticent. Occasionally the man on horseback looked down at the easy running red man, plumed and rugged, and wondered if the chief were possibly scheming to separate him from his daughter and to favor the Sheriff. But poor Mr. Thorn could not fathom the depths of the Indian nature. He made up his mind that if it was a scheme on the Indian's part, it was working to perfection. So all he could do was to smile to himself and

thank his stars that he was on horseback, and running away from the outlaw as fast as he could.

Meanwhile the Sheriff, far ahead, had cast Hardeman and all his ways behind for the present, and turned his thoughts to his lady and love.

At a certain leafy spot where the boughs arched above them, the fire within him would no longer be restrained. Checking the horses, with a low cry of "Myra," he opened his arms, and the girl, half willing, half resisting, had gone into them.

"Now I know I'm your lover. Last night I was scared it was a dream of mine," he said.

"You scared!" she laughed in tender mockery. "I could almost feel sorry for your outlaw, since I know what he will have to encounter."

The Sheriff silenced the flattery. "About Hardeman. You know I have a score to settle with him worse even than his trying to rob me of you," he said gravely. And as they rode on, his hand tightly clasping hers, he told her as much of the story of Jeff's wife as a lover might tell. "When I got up here near the camp, and I heard about you, something like ice struck me—I guess now it was a premonition—and I pushed on after the beast, night and day, mad to get him. I missed him, but I got you. I guess I

was in time, Myra, wasn't I?" Earnestness made the question scarcely audible. It was one which had been burning the Sheriff's soul for days.

"Yes, yes. . . . But oh, it was horrible," she said with a shiver at the remembrance of that night before his coming.

"What! He didn't dare to hurt you?" the muscles of the Sheriff's hands were like steel springs, and warmed by the very savagery of her lover, Myra laughed at the vanished horror, her eyes shining on him through grateful tears.

"No, I threw him off. I flirted and laughed at him . . . I hoped some one would come. I made believe I liked him, and so I kept him down somehow. But *faugh* . . . he kissed me once."

"The devil! I'll cut his lips off:" growled the Sheriff fiercely.

"Then you came. And though I didn't know you, I felt safe, my Sheriff," she whispered softly, smoothing him down. "No, no—Oh, you're too greedy. I shall have to begin and keep count on you."

"Oh, very well," he retorted, "Now if you won't smile at me for the next five minutes, I'll relate to you how I found my fortune." But he made her laugh while he told of poor Talabam's

troubles with the woman question, and his despairing generosity with his river of gold.

More gravely he spoke of himself. To lead a fearless, dare-devil sort of life, and to be known as an expert with his gun, had pleased him once, some time ago. Lately he had grown dissatisfied, and thought a man should have some better account to show for his life. Such work was good enough for boys, perhaps. Then he had met her, and fallen in love. As a poor Sheriff with little but his name and six hundred a year, he should never have spoken, however. It might have been long before he would have felt at liberty. Now, through the red man's friendship, and with his gift as a starter, he hoped very shortly to make a place and honor for himself in the world.

So all afternoon they rode alone beneath leafy canopies, faithful Talabam keeping well in the rear; and no eyes but Myra's saw her Sheriff in his role of lover, and no ears but hers heard his ardent wooing.

Night approached and the camp of the patrol became dimly visible to them. The Sheriff flung himself from his horse and came and stood beside her, his arms resting on either side of her on the animal's back. Deep twilight was on his face, and in his eyes the yearning of a strong man's love.



All the afternoon they rode alone beneath the leafy canopies.

"I'm going back on the trail to-morrow, little woman. I shan't see you in private again until—until I've finished that business. Give me your good-night here." And taking her from her horse he held her long in his steady arms, while he took a lover's good-night from her lips.

"For a day or two," he whispered; and then taking the bridles of the horses, he led them into camp, with Myra walking beside him, Mr. Thorn and Talabam coming rapidly in the rear.

Myra and her father shortly retired to the large cabin, for they were to remain that night at the camp. Outside, where the camp fire glowed, the Sheriff became the centre of a good-natured, admiring crowd.

"Where's the outlaw?" drawled Jenks slyly. "You went arter him, didn't you, Sheriff?"

"Shut up, Jenks; he'll get the bad man all right," smiled another, "but he had to get the lady first, you know."

"Seems to me," mused Butts, "that it looks like a weddin' march, this here return to camp. Talabam, you deep-dyed redskin, what did you do to the old man to keep him so far behind?"

The Sheriff was red in the face, and chewing his lip; but Talabam came to the rescue and began to limp.

"The Chief of the Yakimas," he explained,

“had a bad leg; and the millionaire’s horse was aged.”

They roared. But the abashed Sheriff stood his ground. “You boys don’t want to get too merry,” he said. “Remember the outlaw is hereabouts; he’s due to drop around unexpected,” saying which he made off for the kitchen and the care of Yang Foo and Yang Ko.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RECKONING.

LATE that night the patrol captain and the Sheriff, with Talabam, talked long and seriously about the possibility of the outlaw's striking in some unexpected way. They knew that revenge would be his impelling motive now; and finally it was decided that the Indian should betake himself to the heights above and keep watch. If he saw aught of Hardeman skulking in the proximity of the camp he was to signal to the Sheriff and the guards, who would remain under cover.

Morning came with its gray haze, and its gentle wind, and the Sheriff and Butts, who had rested but little, went to the large cabin for an early breakfast with Mr. Thorn and Myra. It was a joyous meal to the girl and her father; but the two others were preoccupied, and their anxiety was but poorly concealed.

Myra was pouring the Sheriff's coffee, when a penetrating distant cry came suddenly to their ears. It sounded like the cry of a night-hawk, and Mr. Thorn and Myra paid no heed to it; but the Sheriff and Butts exchanged glances. It

came again, this time for all the world like the cry of a bird robbed of its prey, sharp and angry, but far off.

The Sheriff knew well its meaning. It was the imitative voice of the Indian, and the message it conveyed was that the outlaw was near and coming nearer.

"Here, Sheriff, take the coffee; you look tired out," said Myra entreatingly.

"Thanks, I will," was the quiet answer, "but first I must step outside. I forgot to tell Talabam something about that horse of mine."

"That horse! Oh, Sheriff, you're too careful; drink a cup first anyway."

The Sheriff walked towards the door, shaking his head laughingly. "No, thanks—I must be going. I'm afraid something may be wrong with the nag's hoof, don't you see?"

"Oh! you and your borrowed horse," retorted Myra, tossing her head. "Go along then, and let us see you when you've doctored him."

The Sheriff smiled in reply, and then managed to pitch unceremoniously into Butts, who stood near the door. As he grasped the captain in an apparent endeavor to steady himself he whispered: "Keep them here; keep this door closed. It's Talabam's signal: Hardeman's outside!"

Butts was keenly alive to the situation. With a harsh laugh he helped the other to his feet.

"You're embarrassed, ain't you, Sheriff. Take the other door," he murmured quickly. It was all he could do or say; the anxiety of life and death had come so suddenly.

Quick as a flash the Sheriff of Wasco glided towards the small back door. He paused momentarily and, looking back, smiled at Myra. "I'm a clumsy brute," he said, "pardon me." Then the door closed softly behind him. Butts turned coolly and locked the front door; then he stood by the one whence the Sheriff had made his exit.

But Myra was quick of perception and detected the gravity in Butts' face. She leaped to her feet, and seizing his arm looked keenly at him. "What is it? What is it?" she pleaded.

"Hush, be still," whispered the captain, "If you value the Sheriff's life, be still."

Myra shrank into her father's arms. "It's coming, father;—I know it," she murmured, fear-stricken.

Mr. Thorn stroked her hair gently. "Silence, daughter," he whispered. "He's a brave man."

She tumbled her head on his breast and shuddered with the terror of it. "He'll be killed," she sobbed, "he's in danger—awful danger."

"If you mean the outlaw—you're dead right," volunteered Butts in an endeavor to quiet the girl's fears. "The Sheriff's got a disagreeable

piece of business ahead, but he don't shirk no duty."

He was interrupted. A low cry of surprise, of mingled fright and fury, came from the front of the house; then the voice of the Sheriff rang out quick and harsh.

"Drop that gun."

The answer was an oath and a shot, and those within heard the impact of two bodies as they came together with a fearful crash.

Butts slid out of the door and the night-shift came tumbling from their quarters in answer to the commotion.

Mr. Thorn closed the door and facing Myra held her away from it. She struggled to release herself, but her father conquered. "It's not for us," he insisted, "it's not for us to see."

Butts and the others beheld two men in a fearful embrace. Hardeman's Colt was lying on the ground near by and the Sheriff's had fallen a few feet away. He had evidently lost it while disarming the outlaw. On the Sheriff's left arm was a bloody streak. Hardeman's shot had wounded him, but had not prevented the lightning-like closing in.

A voice rang out, clear and melodious, with the curious Indian accent: "Fight Wasco—fight like the grizzly fights the bull-moose."

It was Talabam who, tall and majestic, entered

the clearing and instinctively the men made room for him.

The Sheriff of Wasco and Hardeman were reeling and straining, the deep spasmodic grunts and the heavy breathing telling of the power in the embrace. Suddenly the Sheriff freed himself, and as Hardeman rushed head down to close in, he dealt the outlaw a fearful swinging blow upon the neck and the rush was stopped.

Hardeman staggered, then collected himself. The sweat was pouring down his face. He was the color of leaden paint. His mouth jerked in a spasmodic attempt to speak; he was wild, furious. The Sheriff had caught him, despite his cleverness, and he realized that the officer of the law was strong, strong as steel.

Looking the outlaw squarely in the blood-shot eyes, the Sheriff spoke:

"Shall I take you, Hardeman?—or will you fight it out here now?"

"Hell," raged the other. "All you can do is to take the girl—and I had her first."

The Sheriff's face blanched at the insult, then the red blood mottled his cheeks. His chest heaved with the effort at self-control. All eyes were on him now.

"Hardeman," he said slowly, his lip curling. "I was going to take you back; but now it's

between us here. You are such a *damned* liar, you're going to die."

The next instant the shock of Hardeman's flying form came crashing against his shoulders. There was a twisting and heaving of bodies, a momentary silence, and then Hardeman was thrown violently backward. On he came again like a bull; the Sheriff's fists met him full on the neck and jaw, but he only shook his head like a terrier and dove into the other, grasping him by the waist. They were locked now for a moment, and the bystanders marvelled at the similarity in figure and face of the two. The Sheriff was slightly lighter, and his face bore none of the innate brutality of the outlaw's; but all told, they were marvelously alike for two who were no blood kin.

Hardeman bore the other to the ground and for several minutes they fought on in silence. Now and again a fierce grunt or a deep sighing breath told of the strain. Then, with a sudden turn, the Sheriff was again free and on his feet. Both men were now nearly naked above the waist, shirts were ripped and destroyed in their fury, and both were bloody. The outlaw's face was hanging one-sided and his neck was oozing blood; the Sheriff's chest was opened from shoulder to breast, and a great gaping wound exposed the muscles beneath, such had been the

power and strength of Hardeman's grip as it tore under his arm.

The savage glint of the contestants' eyes, the heavy breathing, the blood, and the damage that had been done in that first wild attack and repulse, bore witness that this was no ring fight with seconds and sponges, that might last round after round, and whose object was a knockout, simply. This was a fight to the death. The last grapple was on in earnest. It was plain that victory would come suddenly, as it usually does on such occasions, and it would come to the man who secured the first great advantage, whose strength, or agility, or headwork allowed him to first seriously injure his enemy. When men fight to the death things are quick, for the emotions are predominant, and there are no rules to hamper the fighting fury,—the primeval instinct that lies hidden in man underneath all the refinements of all ages, and which when fully roused is not to be governed by any of the laws of civilization.

The Sheriff circled the outlaw and then rushed in. But Hardeman fought him off like a tiger, and he seemed to weaken for a moment. Hardeman came on toward him like a tornado. Suddenly the Sheriff rallied from his apparent weakness and swung a terrific right onto the outlaw's jugular as he side-stepped the latter's rush.

Hardeman, great as he was, had met his match. The Sheriff was brainy as well as agile and strong; and the other had lacked the power of perception to understand that he had not been in real distress. All eyes were bent on the Sheriff as his enemy plunged ahead after that staggering blow, turned, and came back. Hardeman was half dazed; he reeled; and his giant arms swung heavily before him, but on he came and hurled himself wildly against his foe. Again the sounds of sickening blows delivered at close quarters against moist flesh resounded in quick succession.

A sudden thud, and Hardeman's head jerked viciously sideways as the Sheriff's fist reached it, ripping away an ear. Then Hardeman's mouth closed on the Sheriff's arm, and the two fell to the earth, locked in an embrace fearful and silent.

They lay still as statues for half a minute; only the heaving breath, the trickling blood, the muscles taut as steel, proclaimed them living men. The onlookers closed in, but Butts and Talabam waved them away.

Then the two in the deadly embrace began to move. The Sheriff's arm was seen to slowly encircle the outlaw's neck. With a sudden twist he brought his body sidewise to the left of Hardeman, and the arm slid backward so that

the strong fingers reached the throat. But the outlaw made a sudden wrench and freed himself. Both the sweating bodies ran slippery with blood; the mouths of both were agape with exhaustion. Again they came together. Slowly the Sheriff wormed himself atop of Hardeman, and the arm again encircled the neck. Then the muscles contracted, and the body of Hardeman began to arch backward. But fight as he might his enemy was too lithe to be shaken off now. Suddenly with a mighty wrench the Sheriff turned and liberated his encircling arm from the other's neck, but as he did so, he gave it a tremendous sidewise pull. The outlaw fell forward, gasping in a curious crowing fashion—his face blue, his body quivering.

The men looked on aghast; the Indian watched with the face of a Sphinx. This was the greatest fight with nature's weapons that would ever be seen in those woods. It was greater than a bull-moose and grizzly combat.

Hardeman sprang to his feet gasping, and lunging caught the Sheriff's legs in his arms and bore him heavily to earth. There was a muffled shout of dismay from the men, but Talabam was silent. He smiled grimly; for he had fought the Sheriff of Wasco years ago when he was only a devil boy—and *he knew*. With a hoarse snarl Hardeman flung himself on the Sheriff's body,

but the latter had half turned, and again his arm, this time the wounded left, encircled the outlaw's neck.

There was dirt on the hand now, and the oozing blood did not cause it to slip.

Hardeman gasped once; the spectators saw the heaving muscular arm contract and next instant the Sheriff was on top. His right arm was under the outlaw's right shoulder and the purchase was secure. The left arm slid around until the hand was on the front of the neck, then every muscle in the Sheriff's body tightened, his fingers closed, and that fearful wheezing breath began again.

Half-strangled, Hardeman made a last despairing twist; and once again the two staggered to their feet. On the Sheriff's face was a fighting fury that made him nearly unrecognizable. His jaws were clenched. His lower teeth were uncovered by the drawing down of the muscles of the neck. His mouth was devilish to look at. His eyes were half closed, his nose dilated, and the veins of his forehead were turgid. Hardeman was blue and unsteady; his breath came in jerks; he had been nearly strangled. The onlookers gazed in awe; they had seen the death-hold. There was no doubt the Sheriff was winning; they realized the power and the tremendous strength of the man now.

Hardeman was trembling. But pulling himself suddenly together he staggered forward toward the awaiting Sheriff. He felt himself going; his head was reeling. He was beaten; this man was his master. He reeled swiftly and lunged down to the ground, saw his Colt lying there, and seized it weakly; then he staggered to his feet and fired wildly. But the Sheriff had anticipated him, and had stooped and secured his own weapon. Hardeman's shot went wild, and as he dimly perceived the Sheriff armed, and advancing on him, panic, great and overwhelming, seized him. The desire for life had come. He saw that the Sheriff, fearless and unconquerable, was going to close in again, and he tried to fire but his arm wavered weakly; then he turned with a cry of rage and ran—ran lumberingly, desperately, despairingly. The coward in his nature was supreme. Death he dreaded, and it was coming there behind him.

The Sheriff, holding his wounded breast with his left hand, sped across the clearing after the fleeing man. Hardeman looked backward and made for protection and vantage behind a fallen tree.

"Fight," cried the Sheriff hoarsely, as he came rushing on, "fight—damn you!"

For answer, the outlaw crouched behind the tree and fired. The Sheriff was coming on like

a whirlwind. The bullet struck him, but he staggered ahead. Hardeman shifted his position and fired yet again—and instantly the Sheriff's Colt sent its deadly missile.

The outlaw lunged into the clearing; his arms fell heavily, he half turned, and then burrowed his shoulder into the earth.

The Sheriff fell to his knee, his leg hard hit. His chest wound was gaping, and his face was pale from his injuries. The captain and Talamo stooped to aid him; but the fighting fury was not yet spent. He shook himself free and stood over the outlaw's body. "Damn the woman killer!" he exclaimed hoarsely, "he just had to fight—he had to!"

Then the avenger steadied himself.

"Say, fellows," he whispered, in a breathless curiously sympathetic voice. "There was an awful thing happened once in Oregon—that's one reason I'm here. Send this message across the water to Seattle quick, and telegraph it on. He drew a piece of paper from his trousers pocket, and took a pencil from Butts' extended hand; and as the men crowded around he scrawled the following message:

The Deputy Sheriff of Wasco.

Centreville, Wasco Co., Oregon.

"I got him, and he won't come back. Just tell poor Jeff."

And then he signed it, "The Sheriff of Wasco."

A low growl of pleasure came from the men, and two of them prepared to start immediately to forward the news.

The Sheriff limped towards the cabin, supported by Butts. But suddenly they halted, for in that same instant there came a sound from the cabin, a smothered exclamation of joy and relief and a soft flutter of woman's garments, and Myra came running, her eyes, wide with fear and hope, fixed on the conqueror's face. She whispered but one word "—Sheriff!" and with a fearful compassionate movement her hand hovered above his bare, wounded breast. The assemblage of men fell back a little and gave her first place as she led him, limping and leaning slightly upon her, back towards the cabin.

Mr. John Thorn, tremendously excited, was already rushing thence to meet them.

"Sheriff," he exclaimed, half choking, "Sheriff, you're a terrible scrapper. Are you much hurt, my boy?"

"Nope," retorted the limping man, "just kinder shook up, I guess; that's all." And he looked down at Myra.

She laughed a tremulous, glad little sob of a laugh, and with a tender quiver in her voice humored his stoicism, echoing after him:

"Just a little shook up, that's all. Can't you

see for yourself, father?" Which seemed perfectly to satisfy the warrior.

But Dr. Backer was sent for; and until he appeared the Sheriff spent the morning stretched on a bunk in one of the cabins; and the attentions which the eager patrolmen proceeded to shower upon him threatened at first to make the doctor's aid unnecessary. The Sheriff thanked them gratefully but absent-mindedly, until at last Captain Butts interposed.

"Here boys, clear out and give him air. Vamose, all o' you. Don't you know any better 'n to crowd a sick man like that?"

With a sudden dawning of comprehension they went, and the friendly captain himself followed them. The white-faced Sheriff, with much of his late warlike spirit spent, was left alone with the gentler ministrations of Myra and her father.

With an eager, lover-like smile the sick man held out his hand in appeal to the girl; she, blushing, slipped hers within it, and thus the pair of them turned to Mr. John Thorn and looked at him inquiringly.

Taken unawares, the old gentleman swelled, coughed, and spluttered apoplectically for the first moment or two; then he surrendered.

"I knew it. I felt it in my bones. Sheriff," he whispered proudly, "kiss her, you terror—she's yours!"

THE END.

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